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Volume 29 Issue 4 2024

Janell Langford

"This experience is for creatives across the artistic spectrum"

Do immersive experiences have the power to heal?

Reach for the stars

A new kind of planetarium

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

Mental health & the attractions industry

NorthernLight's PETER SLAVENBURG

From swings in the sky to humanising AI

PHOTO: MARCEL BAKKER

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A helping hand

The attractions industry is both an amazing and a tough industry to work for. It's vital to take care of ourselves… and each other

It's an amazing privilege to work in the attractions industry – helping to create experiences that educate, entertain, bring joy and change people's understanding of the world.

It can also be a stressful, high-pressure industry. The cyclical, project-based nature of the themed entertainment sector can make it challenging to work in. Museum and heritage staff supporting visitors in understanding tough topics have an additional emotional burden, while zoo and aquaria workers are regularly exposed to animal injury, illness and death. And in a customer-facing industry, there's always the potential for difficult and upsetting encounters.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put extra pressure on, with clients trying to make up for revenue lost during lockdowns by fast-tracking projects, leading to stressed, burned out staff. The cost of living crisis is seeing extra financial challenges, and inevitable layoffs.

On page 38 we speak to several industry experts grappling with how to better support attractions industry workers. They are open about their own mental health challenges – and that is key. The more people talk about their own experiences, the more others will feel comfortable sharing their feelings. We can learn from one another.

While some of the stigma around mental health issues has lessened, there's still a long way to go. I spoke to someone very senior in a major entertainment company who told me about the severe anxiety he suffers. While he was happy to appear in the article, his employers were not comfortable with it – perhaps this shows how far we still have to go.

At the Themed Entertainment Association's INSPIRE conference in March 2024, a panel explored some of the challenges faced by members, including addiction, anxiety, depression and perfectionism. Over the following days and weeks, the panellists were approached by colleagues sharing their own stories, and pleading for more support.

SHUTTERSTOCK.PEOPLEIMAGES.COM + YURI A

Wellness and mental health are being discussed more openly

> ***Attractions can be a stressful, high-pressure industry to work in***

As a result, the TEA has launched a Wellness Council with the aim of destigmatising mental health issues and supporting the wellbeing of members.

There are other inspiring ideas and initiatives on page 38, but is enough being done? We'd love to hear from you on this topic – please do get in touch.

Magali Robathan, editor
magalirobathan@leisuremedia.com

Attractions MANAGEMENT

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Dominic Jones on shaking up the museum world

© PHARVEY HILLS

All the rides and zones set to open at Aquarabia

IMAGE COURTESY OF QIDDIYA INVESTMENT COMPANY (QIC)

Japan's new Nintendo Museum launches

IMAGE COURTESY OF NINTENDO MUSEUM

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PHOTO: 302 INTERACTIVE

Lowell Observatory has opened a major new centre

IMAGE: LOWELL OBSERVATORY

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PHOTO: THERMENGRUPPE JOSEF WUND

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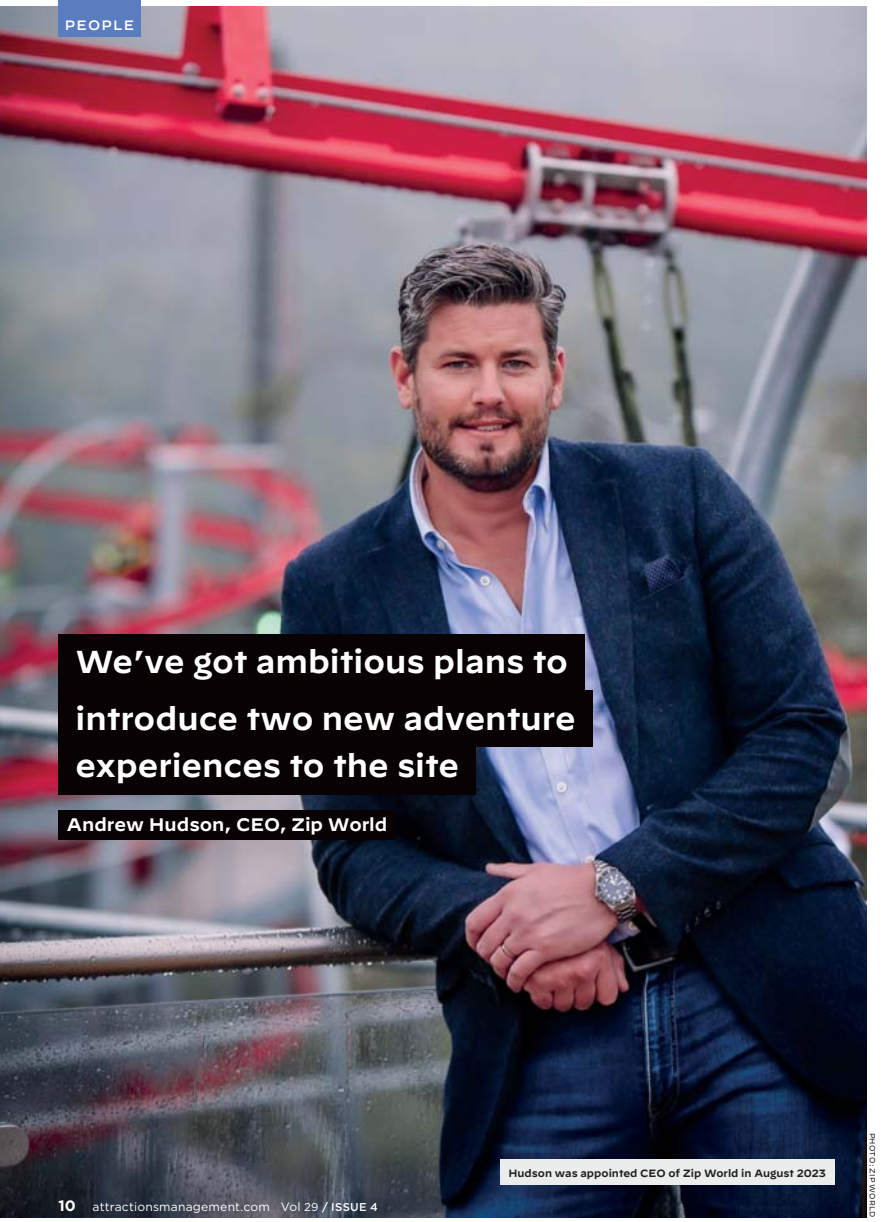


We've got ambitious plans to introduce two new adventure experiences to the site

Andrew Hudson, CEO, Zip World

Hudson was appointed CEO of Zip World in August 2023

PHOTO: ZIP WORLD

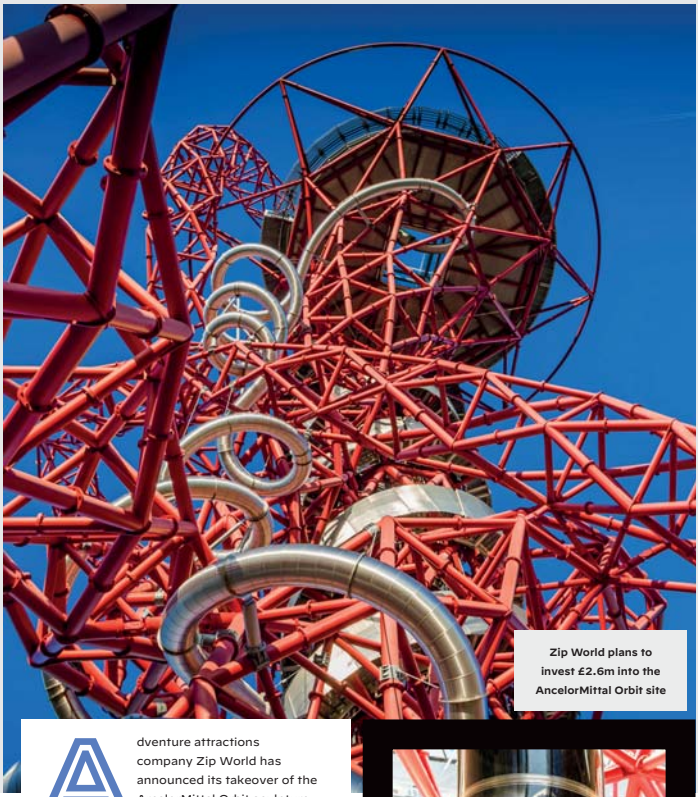


PHOTO: ZIP WORLD

Zip World plans to invest £2.6m into the AncelorMittal Orbit site

Adventure attractions company Zip World has announced its takeover of the ArcelorMittal Orbit sculpture at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in Stratford, London.

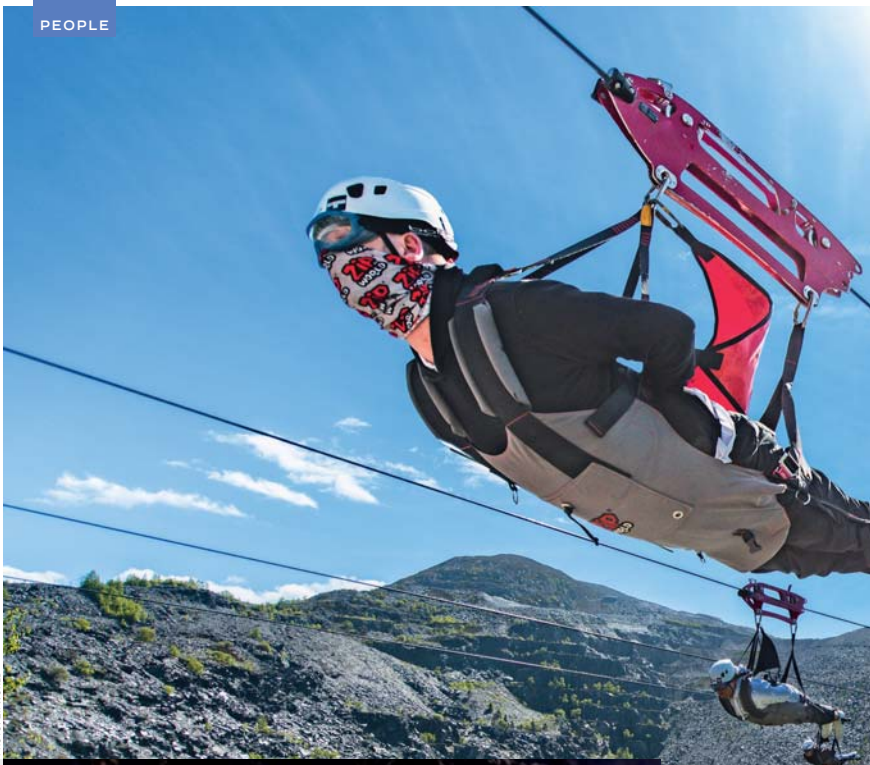
Designed by artist Anish Kapoor and engineer Cecil Balmond for the 2012 London Olympics, the 114.5m-high ArcelorMittal Orbit features the world's tallest and longest tunnel slide, as well as an 80m-high observation deck.

Zip World plans to invest £2.6 million into the attraction, and has said that it is working closely with the team at London Legacy Development Corporation and local planning authorities on new plans for a "European first-of-its-kind adventure at Zip World London."

ArcelorMittal Orbit will be Zip World's ninth location and its first in the south east of England.

Attractions Management speaks to Zip World CEO Andrew Hudson about the plans for the site and its wider ambitions. ▸

PHOTO: ZIP WORLD



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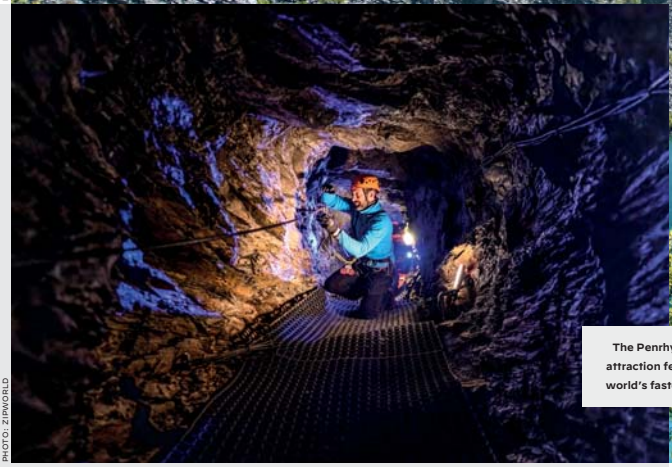


PHOTO: ZIPWORLD

The Penrhyn Quarry attraction features the world's fastest zip line

Zip World offers 33 experiences across eight sites in the UK

Photo: Zip World

What excites you most about the ArcelorMittal Orbit site?

This will be Zip World's first permanent location in London, marking a significant milestone in our company's growth and expansion. Establishing a presence in the capital opens up new opportunities and broadens our reach to a diverse, urban audience.

What plans do you have for the site?

We'll begin by operating the existing 80m-high viewing gallery and slide experience. This allows us to establish our presence in the park while offering visitors immediate access to thrilling experiences.

Subject to planning permission, we've got ambitious plans to introduce two new adventure experiences to the site. These additions are set to be highly differentiated and suitably world-class, aligning with Zip World's reputation for unique and exhilarating attractions.

Can you share any details about the new experiences you're planning to add to the site?

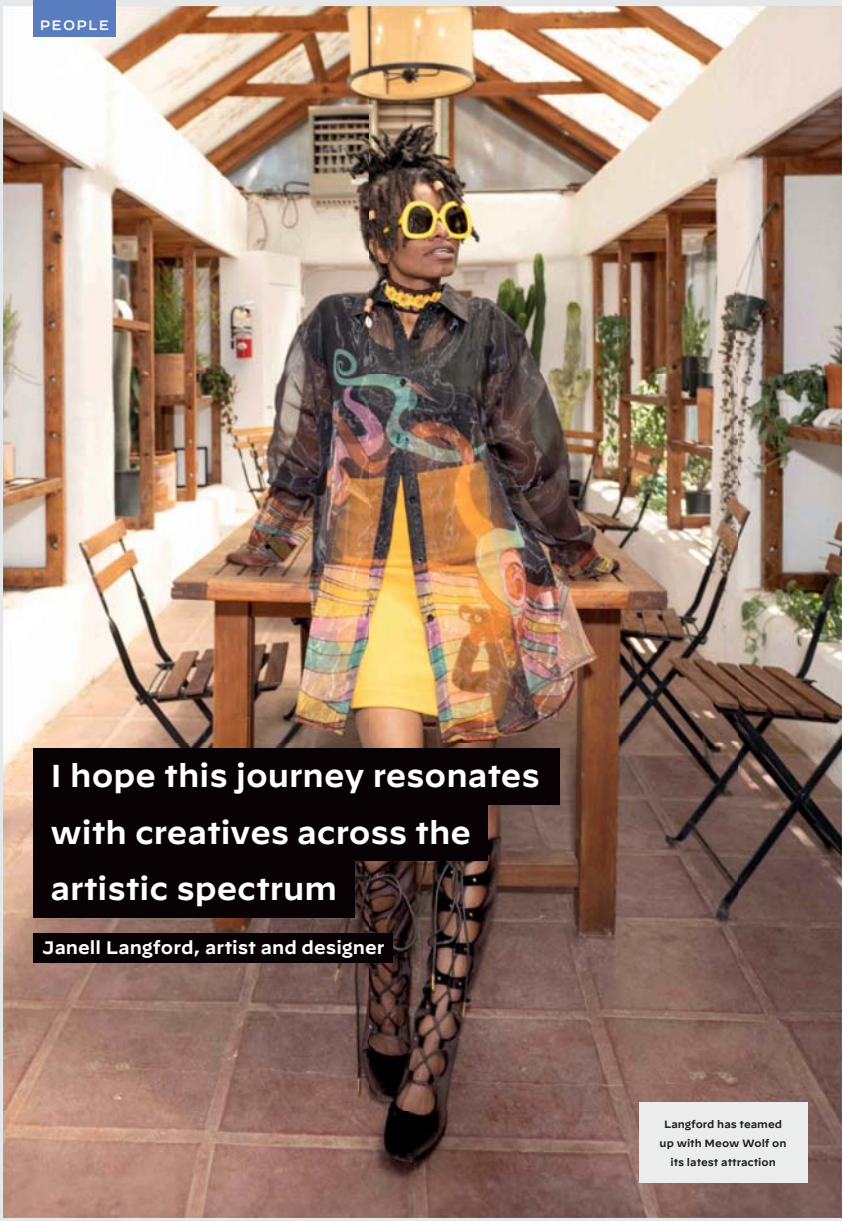
While we're in the early stages and can't divulge specifics, I can confirm that we have plans to introduce brand new adventure experiences to the site, subject to planning permission. Rest assured, these future additions will be exceptional and in line with Zip World's reputation for unique and exhilarating attractions.

Our goal is to deliver memorable adventures that push the boundaries of what's possible in adventure tourism

What other plans does Zip World have over the next few years?

Growth isn't just about new locations. We continue to invest heavily in our existing sites, adding lodging options and new facilities to improve the overall visitor experience. This commitment to upgrading and expanding our current offerings is very much in our DNA. It ensures that even our long-standing locations remain fresh and exciting for both new and returning visitors.

Whether it's developing new differentiated experiences, exploring potential locations in the UK and beyond, or enhancing our existing sites, we're always looking ahead. Our goal is to deliver memorable adventures that push the boundaries of what's possible in adventure tourism. ●

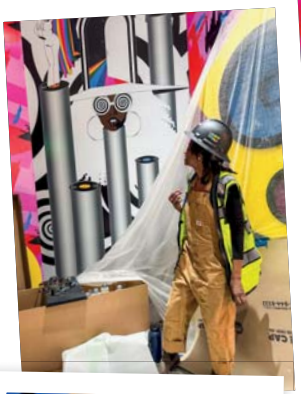


I hope this journey resonates with creatives across the artistic spectrum

Janell Langford, artist and designer

Langford has teamed up with Meow Wolf on its latest attraction

PHOTO: BRANDON SODER



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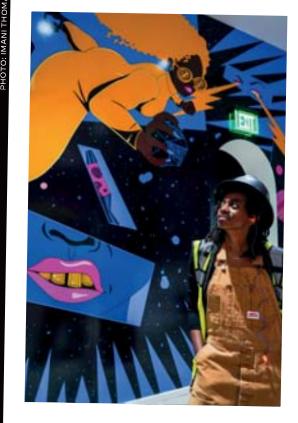

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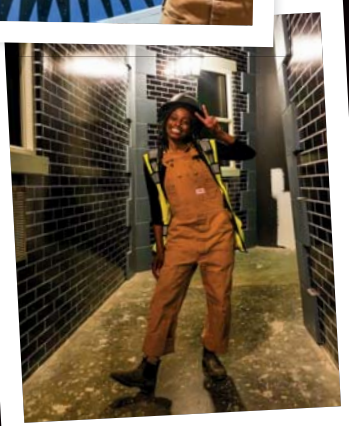

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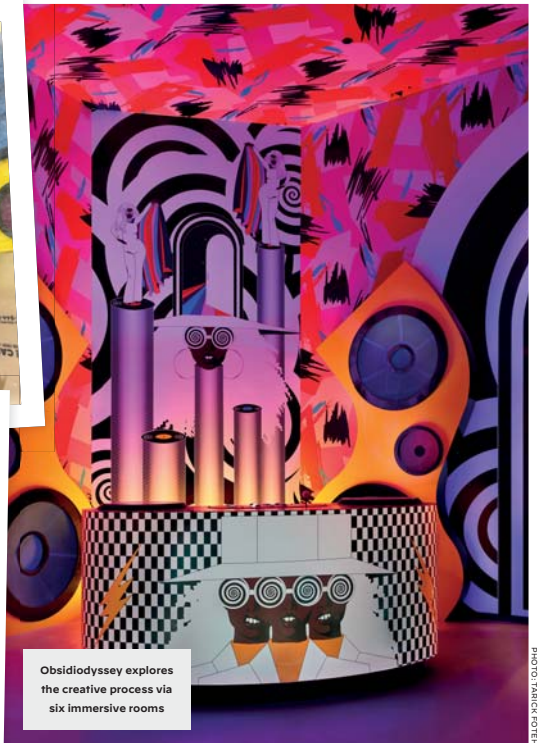


Obsidiodyssey explores the creative process via six immersive rooms

PHOTO: TARICK FOTEH

US artist Janell Langford has created a six-room installation exploring the creative process as part of Meow Wolf's latest permanent attraction in Houston, Texas, US.

Obsidiodyssey is Langford's second permanent installation with Meow Wolf following her CJ's Temporal Lobby exhibition at House of Eternal Return in Santa Fe, US.

It will be one of the central attractions at Meow Wolf's Houston attraction Radio Tave, which opened in October 2024,

Langford, who is known for her intricate world-building and retro-futuristic illustrations, brings her signature blend of fantastical comic book narratives and personal introspection to this new Houston installation. ▸

A journey through the creative process

Obsidiodyssey features a series of spaces that represent different stages of the creative process, explored via Langford's character CJ, described as a " brilliant yet introverted creative with an active imagination".

Visitors join CJ on her assignment, creating the perfect music video for her art director. Browsing through storyboards in CJ's studio, participants can also engage with interactive experiences that capture the flow state of creativity, navigate the challenges of Insidiopolis – an alley inspired by film noir style that symbolises the artist's fears and anxieties – and celebrate at Fantastrophe's House Party, complete with an interactive DJ booth.

Langford plays with the concept of time with a clock on the wall where time passes quickly, recognising that in the creative process time can fly by when in a flow state.

Highs and lows

"I wanted to make an experience that takes guests through the ebb and flow of darkness and joy that comes with putting your whole self into works of art," said Langford.

"For me, making art can be the most beautiful, euphoric thing in the world, but often, getting it out requires facing many of my demons. I hope this journey I've put before our guests resonates with creatives across the artistic spectrum."

Radio Tave – Meow Wolf's fifth permanent attraction – invites visitors to take part in the story of a community radio station transported into a strange realm. It features labyrinthine passageways and hidden doors leading to multi-sensory experiences that include a grotto with instruments that come to life, a honky tonk dive bar, a never-ending dance party, and an open air market.

Meow Wolf's sixth permanent attraction is due to open in Los Angeles in 2026. ●

Meow Wolf's Radio Tave attraction opened in October 2024

PHOTO: ARTURO OLMOS

PHOTO: PHOTO ARTIFACT STUDIOS

Radio Tave tells the story of a radio station pulled into a new realm

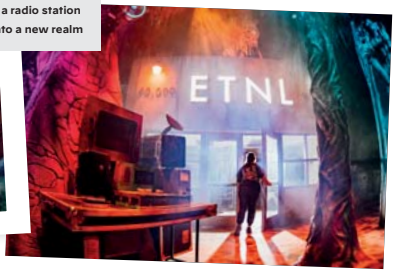


PHOTO: PHOTO ARTIFACT STUDIOS

I wanted to make an experience that takes guests through the ebb and flow of darkness

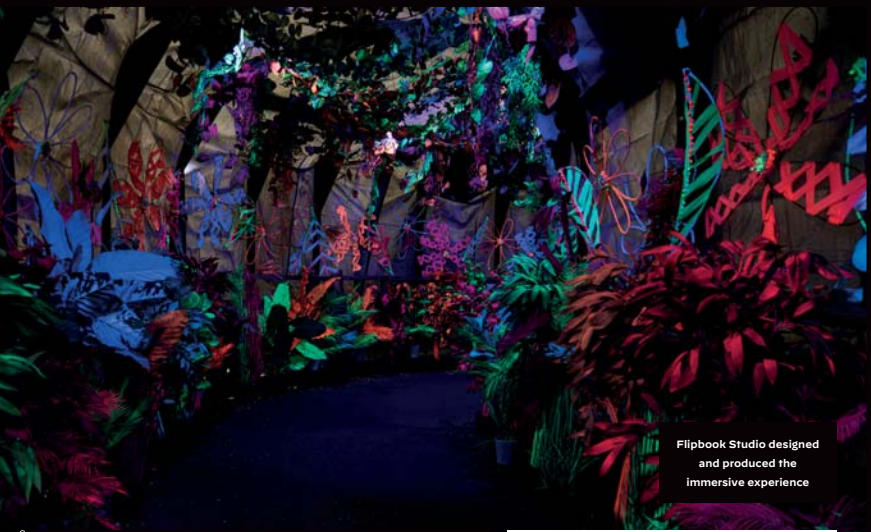
It's every fantasy writer's dream to see their world brought to life

Jess French, children's TV presenter and author

Andrew Lord, director, Flipbook Studio

Author Jess French scripted the Beasts experience

PHOTO: YELLOWBELLY



Flipbook Studio designed and produced the immersive experience

PHOTO: CHESTER ZOO

Visitors can explore three very different ecosystems

PHOTO: CHESTER ZOO

PHOTO: CHESTER ZOO

Chester Zoo has teamed up with zoologist, children's TV presenter and author Jess French and creative production agency Flipbook Studio to launch a new original multi-screen immersive experience.

Using immersive floor projections and 360-degree visual displays, the Beasts animated adventure takes the viewer on 'an extraordinary adventure through unexplored lands, to discover mythical creatures' in a prequel to French's fantasy novel *Beastlands: Race to Frostfall Mountain*.

"I'm thrilled to be collaborating with Chester Zoo and Flipbook Studio," said French. "It's every fantasy writer's dream to see their world and creations brought to life.

"The Beastlands have existed in my imagination for over a decade – seeing the world and its beasts brought to life in this way was extraordinarily exciting and very moving.

"My favourite part of the experience is how interactive it is – I love watching children chasing after cliffcreepers or seeking out glimmerglints in the dark."

Flipbook Studio produced the eight-minute adventure, which uses Panasonic FRZ50s for the wall projections and Panasonic PT-RZ790s for the floor projections. The experience takes visitors on a guided journey through a world inhabited by mythical creatures, as well as frogs, snakes, slugs and bugs.

One of the biggest challenges was ensuring that the 8-minute journey actively engaged visitors throughout the entire space

PHOTO: FLIPBOOK STUDIO

Flipbook director Andrew Lord led the project (above left)

"One of the biggest challenges was ensuring that the 8-minute journey actively engaged visitors throughout the entire space," said Flipbook director and co-founder Andrew Lord.

"With 14 projection screens arranged around the room, we needed to encourage movement and exploration. The goal was to immerse visitors in the world of Beastlands, prompting them to follow the path of different creatures as they moved between screens. This required us to ensure that something captivating was happening on every screen at all times, all while advancing the story in a coherent and immersive way.

"We used a storytelling technique of gradually revealing a main 'hero' creature in each of the three environments, enticing visitors to track the creatures across the room. A voiceover also helps visitors to know where to look or when something important is happening.

"Another challenge was managing seamless transitions between vastly different ecosystems – from a hot, claustrophobic forest to a cold, barren mountain, and then into a mysterious cave. Maintaining the flow of the narrative while keeping visitors grounded in a single physical space was key."

Several of the creatures in the experience have been inspired by animals found at the zoo, according to conservationists at Chester Zoo. ●

PHOTO: CHESTER ZOO

Storytelling techniques encourage visitor movement

PHOTO: CHESTER ZOO

Chester Zoo aims to foster a deeper connection to nature

PHOTO: CHESTER ZOO

US

Universal reveals Vegas horror experience details

Universal Destinations & Experiences (UDX) has announced that its first year-round horror experience will open next year in Las Vegas.

Inspired by the success of UDX's Halloween Horror Nights at Universal parks, Universal Horror Unleashed will feature four horror houses, themed immersive areas with live entertainment and horror-themed F&B options. The attraction will be continuously updated year-round with special events and merchandise offerings.

The four haunted houses will be based on Universal IPs Universal Monsters, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Scarecrow: The Reaping and Blumhouse's The Exorcist: Believer.

"Universal's rich history in the creation of the horror genre drove our desire to bring a year-round horror experience to the incredible entertainment offerings in Las Vegas," said Page Thompson, president of New Ventures for UDX.

"We're thrilled to have our award-winning creative and entertainment teams working tirelessly to bring these terrors to life in 2025."

Horror Unleashed will be the anchor tenant for the 20-acre expansion of Las Vegas's Area 15 immersive entertainment district.

Universal Horror Unleashed tickets will go on sale in 2025.

More: http://lei.sr/x8l4y

IMAGE COURTESY OF NBCUNIVERSAL

Tickets will go on sale in 2025

NBCUNIVERSAL

> "Universal has a rich history in the creation of the horror genre"
>
> *Page Thompson, president of New Ventures for UDX*

EUROPE

Efteling launches Danse Macabre dark ride and creepy forest zone

Dutch fairytale theme park Efteling has launched its new Danse Macabre dark ride and new themed area Huyverwoud Forest.

Inspired by the orchestral piece with the same name, the Danse Macabre ride has been developed with Swiss ride manufacturer Intamin and is described as a "thrill ride with immersive show technology".

It consists of a turntable 18m in diameter topped by six smaller turntables, each with choir stall seating for 18 people. The large turntable rises, tilts and 'spins like a coin' before falling flat.

Danse Macabre replaces Efteling's iconic Spookslot haunted castle attraction, which closed in September 2022.

IMAGE COURTESY OF EFTELING

> "Danse Macabre is creepy, exciting, immersive and overwhelming"
>
> *Fons Jurgens, Efteling CEO*

IMAGE COURTESY OF EFTELING

The Danse Macabre ride was launched for Halloween

Speaking to *Attractions Management*, Efteling CEO Fons Jurgens described Danse Macabre as: "Unique in the attractions industry... spectacular, creepy, exciting, thrilling, immersive and overwhelming – a haunted spectacle full of dark twists."

The attraction sits with the new Huyverwoud Forest themed area, which was inspired by the original Spookslot haunted house attraction and houses themed catering, retail and entertainment.

More: http://lei.sr/a0F7s

MIDDLE EAST

Desert surfing: Bahrain Surf Park to use Wavegarden technology

IMAGE: BAHRAIN SURF PARK/WAVEGARDEN

Wavegarden technology will power the Bahrain surf park

The Bahrain Surf Park – Club Hawaii Experience is set to be the first surf park in the MENA region powered by Wavegarden Cove Technology.

The Bahrain Surf Club will be developed through a partnership between Edamah (Bahrain Real Estate Investment Company), GFH Financial Group and engineering company Wavegarden.

Located within Bilaj Al Jazayer development – a 1.3 million square metre project along Bahrain's scenic southwest coast, the park will also feature a surf school, skatepark, beach bars and family amenities.

Spanish technology provider Wavegarden will provide its Wavegarden Cove technology – recognised as one of the industry's most advanced wave-generation system – to the new park.

The Wavegarden Cove technology will create capacity for over 90 surfers at a time offering more than 20 different wave types to suit all skill levels, from beginners to elite surfers.

"We're thrilled to partner with Bahrain Surf Park and introduce our innovative Wavegarden Cove technology to the region," says Wavegarden's chief commercial director, Fernando Odriozola.

More: http://lei.sr/t5G3U

UK

Bear Grylls Adventure activity site to close

The Bear Grylls Adventure activity site in Birmingham's NEC Centre, UK, is set to close on 11 December 2024, after six years of operation.

The £20m attraction is operated by Merlin Entertainments and was inspired by adventurer Bear Grylls' expeditions around the world. It features 11 experiences including shark diving, rock climbing, zip lining, a high ropes course and 'skydiving' in a wind tunnel.

The centre is closing due to commercial challenges, according to a statement on the Bear Grylls Adventure website, with the COVID-19 pandemic leading to "lasting financial effects."

"This has been a very difficult decision and one that was made only after careful consideration," said the company. "Our priority now is looking after our team members and animals throughout this transition."

Preparations are underway to transfer the animals – which include sharks, rays and tropical fish – to suitable new homes, including to Merlin Entertainments' National Sea Life Centre Birmingham.

"Our team of welfare specialists at Sea Life will oversee the transition process to ensure it runs as smoothly as possible," the company said.

More: http://lei.sr/m4i7u

PHOTO COURTESY OF MERLIN ENTERTAINMENTS

Bear Grylls Adventure is closing after six years

EUROPE

Drents Museum launches radical new presentation

Drents Museum in the Netherlands has launched a radically different presentation of its permanent collection.

The 170-year-old museum teamed up with exhibition design agency Northern Light to create Labyrinthia, a new way of experiencing the highlights of its collection, which include the Yde Girl (an iron age bog body), paintings by Van Gogh, and the world's oldest boat.

Labyrinthia invites visitors to go on a journey through 15 rooms, with a range of activities bringing the artefacts to life.

'In Labyrinthia you can look with your hands, smell the paint of the Northern Figuratives and touch shards from the time of the dolmen builders,' according to Drents Museum's website. 'Learn the techniques of the mammoth hunters, pose with the jewelry of the Princess of Zweeloo and dance at a farmer's wedding.'

Each room has been designed to highlight the artefacts – dark, oppressive colours create an eerie atmosphere in the room dedicated to the Yde girl, while a bright blue space adds a modern twist to the gallery dedicated to the realist art of Matthijs Röling.

"This is a way of telling dedicated and quite magical stories," said Northern Light director Peter Slavenburg.

More: http://lei.sr/j1p5o

PHOTO: DRENTS MUSEUM/SAKE ELZINGA

Visitors can paddle a replica of the famous Pesse canoe

MARCEL BAKKER

> "This is a way of telling dedicated and quite magical stories"
>
> *Peter Slavenburg, director Northern Light*

UK

International Slavery Museum Liverpool gets planning approval

National Museums Liverpool (NML) has received planning approval to redevelop the International Slavery Museum and Maritime Museum into one museum telling Britain's maritime history and its role in the slave trade.

This £58 million project is part of a wider waterfront transformation project that aims to link storytelling, heritage, community and hospitality.

However a £10m government grant awarded for the redevelopment project is under review, following the UK Budget in October.

In a statement, NML said it remained "committed to this important and deeply impactful project, which has been years in development and has grown with the collaboration and guidance of many, including our community stakeholders."

The redevelopment would see the entrance of the International Slavery Museum moved into the Dr Martin Luther King Jr Building. The prominent new entrance would feature an ironwork façade which expresses the journey of the museum from a gallery in the basement of the Maritime Museum to receiving recognition in its own right.

More: http://lei.sr/5r1q6

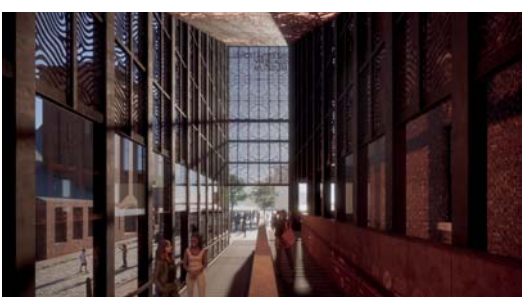


IMAGE COURTESY OF FEILDEN CLEGG BRADLEY STUDIOS

The redevelopment would see the slavery and maritime museums combined

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SAUDI ARABIA

Latest opening as part of Saudi's Red Sea tourism project

Reservations are now open for stays at the hyper luxury Shebara resort in Saudi Arabia as part of the ambitious Red Sea regenerative tourism project.

The launch will mark the debut destination wholly owned and operated by project developer Red Sea Global (RSG) and the fourth to open within the Red Sea development.

The Red Sea giga project aims to protect Saudi Arabia's natural and cultural heritage, while developing the Red Sea coastline into a luxury destination. It spans 1,800km of coastline across three distinct regions, and offers a wide range of heritage, on-land and water activities.

Red Sea Global, which is owned by PIF, aims to build 50 hotels by 2030.

Shebara's concept combines luxury and sustainability and its architecture is intended to harmonise innovative design with the natural environment.

PHOTO: STA

Saudi Arabia's first minister of tourism Ahmed Al Khateeb

IMAGE COURTESY OF RSG

The design is by Killa Design and Rockwell Group

Described as a haven for nature lovers, the resort is situated in a serene oceanfront setting complete with mangroves, desert flora, pristine beaches and coral flats, all of which host a diverse ecosystem of wildlife.

"Our rapid growth and record-breaking achievement positions Saudi as a leading destination for tourism and investment," said first minister of tourism Ahmed Al Khateeb, launching the Saudi Pavilion at the 2024 World Travel Market in London, UK.

More: http://lei.sr/X6a8O

WORLDWIDE

TEA prioritises member wellbeing with launch of Wellness Council

The Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) has announced the launch of a new Wellness Council.

The Council was inspired by a panel discussion at the 2024 Inspire Conference, which explored a range of wellness topics. Feedback from members made the TEA realise that there was a need for the association to centre wellbeing year-round.

The Council aims to encourage TEA's standing committees and divisional boards to centre wellness in their programmes and initiatives through meaningful content, inclusive logistics and increased awareness.

"Creating the Wellness Council means that we can create a suite of coordinated initiatives around mental and physical wellbeing," said Clara Rice, global marketing director at Adirondack Studios and Wellness Council chair.

"Centering physical, mental and emotional wellbeing is essential," added TEA president elect Matt Barton. "I'm excited to see where this council's journey takes the TEA and the industry at large."

See feature on p38 for more.

More: http://lei.sr/T2o0r

SHUTTERSTOCK/WILDSNAP

The Wellness Council will support TEA members

PHOTO: MATT BARTON

> **"I'm excited to see where this council's journey takes the TEA and the industry at large"**
>
> *Matt Barton, TEA president elect*

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UK

Guests to 'float in music' in futuristic zero-gravity experience

The Mandrake, a five-star hotel in London's Fitzrovia district, will unveil a new spa in 2025 offering guests a unique "physical and mental massage" hydrotherapy experience.

The 700sq m facility will launch with a Wavess Wellness Pool – a circular, multi-sensory immersion pool – designed to let guests "float in music and sacred vibrations" using waterhaptic technology to make the pool vibrate with sound at low frequencies.

The zero-gravity flotation experience will be enhanced with soundscapes, chromotherapy and visuals to offer a full-body wellness experience.

The pool has been created through a partnership between Damu, immersive design studio Metaspheric and wellness technology company Wavess.

Wavess founder and CEO Arny B Arnold claims the experience will mimic how a baby experiences the world in the womb.

This new experience is part of a growing trend for immersive wellness experiences that straddle the spa and attractions industry.

" WAVESS offers guided relaxation in an open space to re-calibrate our senses with immersive light, colours, sound and vibrations," said Arny B Arnold.

More: http://lei.sr/P3e7J

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MANDRAKE

The hotel will offer a unique immersive experience

CHINA

Affluent Chinese women redefining travel, finds new report

New research by global travel practice Finn Partners investigates the shifting travel habits of affluent Chinese female travellers and how wellness is influencing their travel choices.

The report, *China's Women in Charge: Latest Trends among the World's Largest Travel Spenders and Decision Makers,* draws insights from a survey of 800 high-value Chinese women and was conducted in collaboration with ILTM Asia Pacific.

According to the UNWTO, China reclaimed its position as the world's top spender on international tourism in 2023, with female travellers accounting for almost 60 per cent of the country's outbound tourists.

The new report states that 54 per cent of high-valued Chinese females intend to increase their leisure travel over the next three years, while over 60 per cent plan to spend more on travel, including hotels and accommodation.

Given their significant spending power and economic status, these high-net-worth Chinese women are poised to powerfully influence the future of luxury travel and wellness.

Findings from the report revealed a major shift where Chinese women are harnessing their expanding economic and social influence and growing financial independence, and using travel as a means of self-discovery, cultural immersion and personal growth.●

More: http://lei.sr/u5R3V

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High value Chinese women are using travel as a means of self-discovery

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At Labyrinthia in the Netherlands, visitors are placed at the centre of the story

PHOTO: HENRI VERHOEF

Peter Slavenburg

From a radical new way of presenting ancient objects to a vertical observation wheel and an AI exhibition with a human touch, NorthernLight likes to do things differently. Magali Robathan speaks to the director to find out more

In October 2024, Drents Museum in the Netherlands opened Labyrinthia – a radical new way of presenting items from the 170-year-old museum's collection.

Drents Museum is celebrated for its temporary exhibitions – which have included an exhibition of the Chinese Terracotta Army that drew record numbers of visitors – housed in a modern underground extension.

The original building housing its permanent collection, however, was dated and dusty, and the operators decided it was time for a complete turnaround in the way they presented their collection.

This is where creative design agency NorthernLight came in. The Amsterdam-based agency – headed up by Peter Slavenburg and Steven Schaeken – aims to inspire people to see the world in a new way. Instead of finding a way to exhibit more of the museum's large collection, the choice was made to exhibit a small number of artefacts and stories, and focus in depth on each one.

"We wanted to help visitors really understand these masterpieces through stories," Peter Slavenburg tells me, speaking from NorthernLight's offices in Amsterdam. "Labyrinthia is kind of like a book of fairytales, except that all of the fairytales are true."

Visitors go on a journey through 15 rooms, with each displaying just a few artefacts, helping them to see the objects in a new way. The famous Pesse canoe – the world's oldest boat – now has a room to itself, for example, with visitors able to learn about the prehistoric landscape that was around when it was built, and paddle a replica of the canoe through the ancient bog landscape.

PHOTO: MARCEL BAKKER

WE DON'T WANT TO DO WHAT'S ALREADY BEEN DONE

Peter Slavenburg launched NorthernLight with Steven Shaeken in 1998

Experimenta's new AI Pavilion aims to explore AI in a friendly, neutral way

PHOTO: EXPERIMENTA GGMBH

▸ "Our strapline is space for new thinking," says Slavenburg. "Sometimes our experiences are literally about new thinking – it could be about sustainability, or diversity, for example – and sometimes they aim to offer a different perspective on an existing topic. Either way, we don't want to do what's already been done."

No preconceptions

A recent project that arguably does both is German science centre Experimenta's 180sq m Artificial Intelligence Pavilion, which opened in April 2024.

For the team, it is important to always approach each new project without preconceptions. AI can feel quite 'cold' as a topic, explains Slavenburg, and the temptation could be to design a futuristic, sci-fi type exhibition.

"We wanted to look at AI from a different angle," says Slavenburg. "We started with the idea that the source of AI is human. AI exists because humans exist – it's not an extraterrestrial threat.

"All of a sudden that opened up the option of creating a very human AI exhibition. We aimed to create an experience that allows visitors to interactively engage with the principles of AI in a neutral and friendly way."

The space has been designed to be as friendly as possible, with a lot of wood and pastel colours, and playful workstations that allow visitors to try out AI applications in a fun way – creating poems and works of art that they can take home.

Future projects

Friends Peter Slavenburg and Steven Schaeken launched NorthernLight in 1998, after working together on the development of the NEMO science museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

The creative agency designs exhibitions and experiences for brands, museums, science centres and public spaces, with clients including the Tate; Heineken; Shanghai Science & Technology Museum in China; and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

The team is currently working on a number of projects, including the World Heritage Centre Wadden Sea in the Dutch fishing village of Lauwersoog, which is due to open in spring 2025. Located in a building designed by Dorte Mandrup, the centre will house an interactive experience highlighting the natural value of the Wadden Sea and the ecological challenges it faces. ▸

PHOTO: DRENTS MUSEUM/HENRI VERHOEF

LABYRINTHIA IS KIND OF LIKE A BOOK OF FAIRYTALES, EXCEPT THAT ALL THE FAIRYTALES ARE TRUE

Each room at Drent Museum's Labyrinthia has a unique atmosphere

IMAGE: MAGNICITY

Spiral Tower will be powered by solar and wind energy

▸ Other projects in the works include the Rembrandt & Saskia Experience in St Annaparochie, Netherlands, which will tell the little known love story of artist Rembrandt van Rijn and his wife Saskia Uylenburgh. The immersive experience – which is currently at the masterplanning stage – will include audiovisual technology, a variety of artefacts and an outdoor route taking in locations that were an important part of Rembrandt and Saskia's love story.

Looking up

As space in cities becomes ever harder to find, Slavenburg and the team find themselves increasingly interested in high rise attractions and rooftop experiences.

Spiral Tower is one such attraction. Billed as 'the most sustainable high-rise attraction in the world,' it has been conceived as a vertical version of the traditional observation wheel, and will be powered by solar and wind energy.

Developed by Groenendijk Engineering and NorthernLight and now being rolled out together with high rise experts Magnicity – the Spiral Tower features transparent electric passenger cabins spiralling up and down its façade, generating energy on the way down.

"We're really enthusiastic about this one," says Slavenburg. "It's going to be a great attraction, it can be personalised in exciting ways and it will be very sustainable – both ▸

IMAGE: DORTE MANDRUP ARKITEKTER

IMAGE: NORTHERN LIGHT

IMAGE: NORTHERN LIGHT

The World Heritage Wadden Sea project is due to open in 2025

IMAGE: DORTE MANDRUP ARKITEKTER

The 2,000-year-old Yde Girl is one of Drent Museum's most prized artefacts

PHOTO: DRENTS MUSEUM/ISAAE ELZINGA

Dutch artist Matthijs Röling's work is showcased against a modern backdrop

PHOTO: DRENTS MUSEUM/ISAAE ELZINGA

PHOTO: NORTHERN LIGHT

because it will generate its own energy and because it requires way less material to build it than a traditional observation tower or wheel."

The basic concept can be personalised in a number of ways, Slavenburg adds. "The cabins will be equipped with augmented reality screens that tell the stories of the surrounding area. Also the speed of the cabins' movement can be adjusted, and they can be stopped at various points to take advantage of the views.

"The first Spiral Tower should open within the next two or three years – most likely in South Korea."

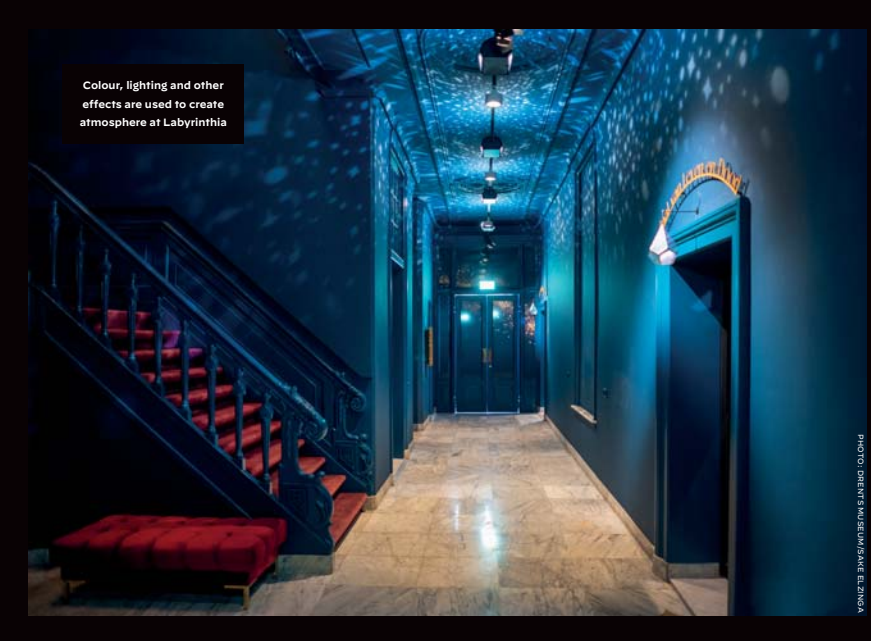
The firm also has a number of projects that aim to make the most of existing rooftop space. In 2016, the NorthernLight-designed Over the Edge swings launched on the top of the A'DAM tower in Amsterdam. The attraction features four red swing seats, offering thrill seekers views of the city from almost 100 metres high.

Following the success of that project, NorthernLight is working on a number of other high rise experiences, including one currently being developed in Budapest, and also regularly launches concepts with the aim of inspiring city planners about the possibilities of high rise experiences. Recent concepts include Panorama Pool, a transparent ring-shaped rooftop swimming pool; the Skyline Mosaic observation deck, featuring coloured mosaic walls that provide unusual views; and Eye in the Sky, which allows visitors to 'walk in the space between the city below and its warped mirror image above.

"We love the idea that rooftops are forgotten places in the urban landscape," says Slavenburg. "They've got such great potential." ●

NorthernLight engages the senses and aims to offer a different view of the world

PHOTO: DRENTS MUSEUM/HENRI VERHOEF



Colour, lighting and other effects are used to create atmosphere at Labyrinthia

PHOTO: DRENTS MUSEUM/SAKE ELZINGA

Visitors can paddle a replica of the Pesse canoe through ancient boglands

PHOTO: DRENTS MUSEUM/SAKE ELZINGA

Labyrinthia, Drents Museum, Assen

Opened on October 20, 2024, Labyrinthia is a new collection presentation at Drents Museum, Assen in the Netherlands.

In Labyrinthia, visitors go on a journey of discovery through 15 rooms of the museum. This journey takes in several of the museum's masterpieces, including the Yde girl (a bog body from the 1st century found in Assen in 1897), the Pesse canoe, and some of Van Gogh's paintings.

Visitors listen to iconic stories, go on a mammoth hunt, experience the world through the eyes of Vincent van Gogh, and paddle a canoe through the ancient bog landscape. The stories of 15 important artefacts are told in an interactive way that engages all of the senses – multimedia presentations bring history to life and visitors are encouraged to touch, smell, dance, and explore.

A HELPING HAND

Whether it's museum staff grappling with tough topics or themed entertainment professionals dealing with the pressures of the industry, attractions workers need support. Magali Robathan speaks to some experts grappling with these issues

For those who work in the attractions industry, thinking about visitors' emotions and wellbeing is key. But what about the wellbeing of staff? How does the industry affect their mental health? How should they be supported?

The themed attractions industry is high-paced and fun, but also potentially unstable and stressful. Museums and heritage attractions provide a key role in society, but dealing with tough subjects and supporting visitors can take its toll.

As discussions around mental health and wellbeing become more common, we ask whether the industry could do more to support workers, and look for some ideas about how best that can be done.

How can attractions companies support the wellbeing of their staff?

SHUTTERSTOCK.PEOPLEIMAGES.COM · YURIA

Clara Rice
Director of global marketing, Adirondack Studios

I was overwhelmed, leading to a vicious cycle of accelerating burnout

Rice's personal experience with mental health challenges informs her work

PHOTO: CLARA RICE

What aspects of the attractions industry can be challenging for staff and their mental health?
The cyclical and gig-economy nature of this industry is extremely challenging. For contract workers, there's that nagging question of 'what will my next project be', which is incredibly stressful.

There are also the ebbs and flows of the economy, which affect cash flows and the pace of projects. The last few years have seen attractions operators struggling to make up for time lost during the pandemic, which means reigniting projects at breakneck paces. Now people are reining in their discretionary spending, it will be interesting to see how decreased demand will affect employment. Already we're seeing substantial layoffs, which of course have a negative impact on mental health.

Themed entertainment has another challenge right in its name. Entertainment inherently means flamboyant, social, extroverted – traits that usually go hand-in-hand with alcohol consumption. When you mix financial insecurity and social anxiety with conference open bars, it's not a recipe for wellness success.

You've been open about your own challenges. Can you share your experience?
I'm a lifelong perfectionist prone to imposter syndrome and insecurities related to my visual disability. Having two children 20 months apart meant post-partum depression was added to that unfortunate mix.

In the early 2020s, my role expanded, as did the demands on my time and expectations on my performance. Forty hours per week became 50 then 70, and my obsessive need to prove myself didn't help my boundary-setting.

My children were toddlers, so between work and home I was always in demand. I was overwhelmed, leading to a vicious cycle of accelerating burnout.

What changes did you make?
I've removed alcohol from my life, am now in a work environment where I feel supported, valued and empowered, and am more present with my family and friends.

I use various techniques to safeguard my physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. I exercise daily and try to eat better. I close my computer on Friday at 5pm and (usually) don't open it again until Monday. I turn off my mobile work apps on holiday. There's no such thing as true work-life balance, so I try to practice work-life integration as much as possible.

Whether at home, at the office, or on the show floor, people need to find the healthy coping mechanisms that work best for them.

What advice would you give employers wanting to support their staff better?
Ultimately, it's the responsibility of the individual to safeguard their own wellbeing. That being said, there are a variety of ways that employers can create a positive, wellness-centered culture, including flexible working hours, generous PTO and maternity leave, quiet work spaces, and communication and leadership training for supervisors.

There are also easy ways to create healthy work environments that cost nothing. Be transparent about upcoming layoffs, reassignments or structural changes. Avoid sending messages outside of work hours. Plan for and then respect peoples' holiday time. Offer palatable mocktails at company happy hours.

Probably the easiest place to start is just to say 'thank you' – early and often.

Operationalising the care of staff is key to ensuring they feel properly supported

PHOTO: DARNELL VENNIE/COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION

Richard Josey
Director of DEAI, Virginia Association of Museums
founder and principal consultant, Collective Journeys

If leaders want to support staff, the first thing they need to do is support themselves

What does your job involve?

I'm a facilitator, trainer and equity and inclusion consultant, with a focus on museums and historical sites. I work with operators, looking at how to tell powerful stories that include everyone, and how to take care of staff and visitors. Through workshops, events and other resources, I try to create space where people can talk openly about inclusivity, belonging and wellness. My work also focuses on programming and exhibit design, looking at how we can design with these issues in mind.

I have a team of therapists and coaches that work with me, so when I'm working with a client, I can connect them if they need extra support.

Why is it important to support the mental health of museum staff?

I don't hear a lot of people talking about the connection between mental health and museum work, but I know from my own experience that it can be emotional and tough work.

I have worked as a historical interpreter at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Virginia, US, interpreting African American histories, including those of enslaved people, and I found myself dealing with difficult encounters.

I've been walking down the street in costume, and I've had people call me the N word. It's not an everyday occurrence, but if it happens once, that's enough to get you down.

I've also had experiences with visitors who were simply unaware of how to interact with a black man portraying an enslaved person. I had times when people said things that offended me, but they had no idea. Now I look back as an older man, I recognise the degree to which that impacted me and the way that I saw myself.

How should staff be supported in the work that they do?

Training in how to deal with difficult encounters and how to regulate emotions is important as part of a suite of resources. It's vital to have a good support system in place – to have a space staff members can go to when they're overwhelmed, and to have other staff members who can take over when needed. Operationalising the care of staff is key.

I'd also love to see more organisations embracing healing methods, and creating time for them during the working day. A former client of mine, the Penumbra Centre for Racial Healing in Minnesota, US, offers meditations and singing bowl sessions for staff during work hours. That's a beautiful example of management operationalising healing because they recognise that the work can be difficult.

If leaders want to support staff, they need to support themselves. I keep finding leaders suffering from anxiety or depression, and I can see the impact that has on the staff. I'm asking leaders to be self-aware, to seek out coaching and therapy, and to offer those opportunities to their staff.

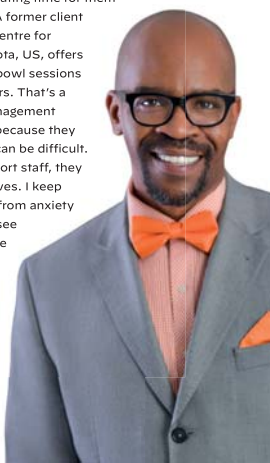


PHOTO: JONATHAN CONKLIN PHOTOGRA-

This industry that prides itself on bringing magic, happiness and wonder to so many can also bring incredible stress – and in some cases misery – to the people creating those experiences

Matt Barton

President elect, Themed Entertainment Association

PHOTO: WWW.CHRISTOPHERANDREOU.COM

Matt Barton is president elect of TEA and will become president in January 2025

What issues relating to mental health are you finding TEA members approaching you about?

What I've witnessed is not so much members raising issues regarding mental health and wellness but the powerful reaction to the programming the TEA has provided on those subjects. This highlights to me the importance of TEA taking the lead in talking about these things as when we start discussing these subjects openly, people who might otherwise keep their challenges and experiences to themselves find a safe place to share, learn and to educate each other.

Why are you so passionate about the topic of mental health?

I love the industry in which we work but the irony is not lost on me that this industry that prides itself on bringing magic, happiness and wonder to so many guests can also bring incredible pressure, stress and in some cases misery to the people working so hard to create those experiences.

I've had my own challenges in this respect, and the conversation prompted by the TEA programming on the subject quickly helped me to appreciate that I was far from alone. Only when we start talking and sharing, can we start making positive change for ourselves, our companies and I hope ultimately, our industry.

What are the biggest advantages for companies in addressing the mental health of their employees?

As a company owner, it seems obvious to me that the wellbeing of my staff is directly linked to the performance of the business. Investing as a business in promoting a healthy and happy workforce is a win-win equation.

As company leaders, it can be extremely difficult, financially and emotionally to protect our workforce from the highs and lows of our project-based industry but we have found successes from small steps; more flexibility around working

PHOTO: COLIN WELCH

The TEA has pledged to put wellness at the heart of its programmes and initiatives

PHOTO: ERIC CANTRELL

hours, proactive staff recognition schemes and more management face time all help.

There are no silver bullets, but just showing recognition of the importance of valuing our teams is a great first step, as long as we back up our words with action.

Do you have any advice for leaders looking to improve their provision in this area?

You're not alone! Most strong leaders want to do the best for their teams, but leadership is an art not a science and there is no binary equation that will help us deliver team harmony and euphoria.

Use your connections, talk with other leaders and team members from other organisations, hear what has and hasn't worked for them and try things out. It's important to find out what works for you and for your team.

This is why I'm so excited that the TEA is launching the Wellness Council to help facilitate and promote discussion and idea sharing in this area.

Launch of the TEA Wellness Council

In September 2024, the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) announced the launch of a new Wellness Council in order to better support TEA members. The Council aims to encourage the association's standing committees and divisional boards to centre wellness in their programmes and initiatives through meaningful content, inclusive logistics, and increased awareness.

The creation of the Wellness Council was inspired by a panel led by TEA members at the 2024 INSPIRE Conference entitled *When Things Go Wrong: A Candid Conversation*. Topics included perfectionism, addiction, anxiety, depression, and the tendency for members to have to repress all of the above to ascend in leadership and in some cases, retain their positions at all. The panellists were approached afterwards with multiple requests from members keen for more discussions and support.

"It seemed crazy to us that such important topics as workplace culture, quiet quitting, and burnout were only being formally discussed at a couple of 20 or 30-minute sessions per year," says Clara Rice, director of global marketing at Adirondack Studios and Wellness Council chair. "Creating the Wellness Council means that we can work with TEA staff, international boards and divisions to create a suite of coordinated initiatives around mental and physical wellbeing."

Initiatives include 'net-walking mixers', non-alcoholic alternatives at events, 'success guides' for conferences, and guidance on wellness content for in-person sessions.

TEA members are being asked to fill out a short wellness survey assessing where they are in their wellness journey, how their work environment is supporting that journey, and what the council can do to provide additional support.

Our emotions permeate our walls and exhibitions, and affect visitors' abilities to get through our spaces

Dr Tonya Matthews
President, International African American Museum

Why is it so important to support your staff and their mental health?

The mission of the International African American Museum is to honour the untold stories of the African American journey. We talk through truth, triumph and trauma.

It's important to acknowledge that this is tough and sometimes stressful work. Our staff have to deal with the emotion of the tough stories that we tell, and with the immense pressure to get this right at a time when people are debating whether we should even be having these conversations in the first place.

Obviously the topics that we deal with are critical here, but I think this arguably applies across the museum, art and culture world. Most museums – certainly history museums – are likely to be in the crosshairs of some very challenging conversations right now.

We're still thought of as spaces for open conversations; we're still seen as trusted institutions. This is a privilege, but it's a privilege that comes with a lot of weight. We've got to bear that weight.

What are the implications of not taking care of employee's mental health?

If we don't support our staff properly, they will leave us – it's as simple as that.

Also, if you don't take care of your team, they can't take care of visitors. We're a front facing sector, so we can't hide. Our emotions

Support for staff needs to be very intentional, says Dr Tonya Matthews

PHOTO COURTESY OF INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSEUM

GREG NOIRE

The IAAM museum tells the 'unvarnished stories of the African American experience'

and mental state permeate our walls, our exhibitions, and affect visitor's abilities to get through our spaces. Visitors feel something of what staff feel – you can always tell how good a culture is at an organisation by the way its team members interact with its customers.

How do you support staff at the IAAM?

We've been very intentional about preparing staff in supporting visitors to the museum, and in thinking about what staff need. Our training falls into three categories: Cultural competency, self-awareness and self-care. All staff members undergo cultural competency and empathy training so that they can welcome visitors with different emotions and experiences to the museum. We explore our biases, and discuss why our communication styles matter and how to recognise when someone is stressed out. Staff are trained in how to recognise when visitors or their colleagues are on their edge.

We've done lots of work on communication and how to support visitors. Now we're at the stage of investigating what we can do to support staff in their self-care. It can be simple things, like reminding staff to stop and take several deep breaths. I'm in talks with my HR manager about whether we might run yoga classes for staff. It's an ongoing process.

Our visitors look to us as steadying the rudder in the storm, much as my staff look to me. Being able to be steady does require a certain amount of constant work.

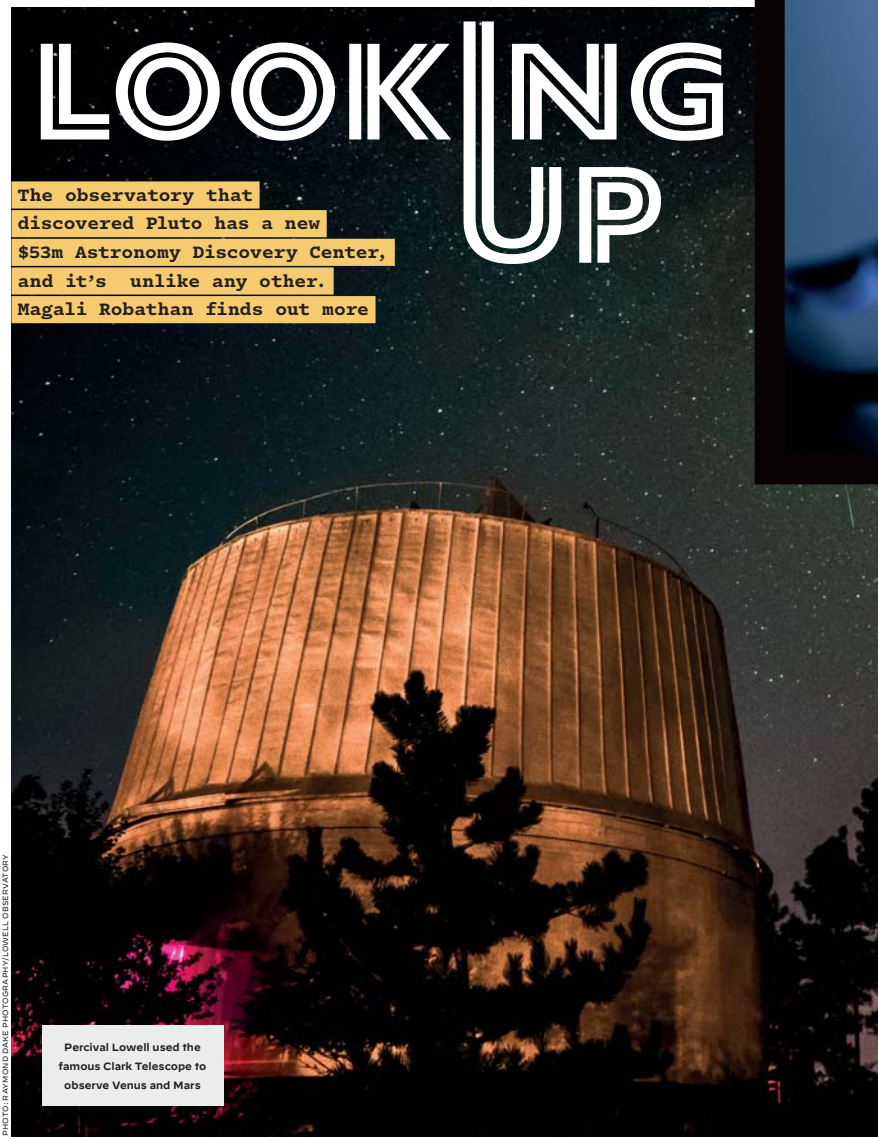
How common is it to go into this level of depth in terms of supporting staff?

In my experience, it's not common, although recently there's been a lot more attention paid to this topic. I think this is one of the expectations and requirements of the newest generations in the workforce.

We're having more robust conversations and trying to figure out how to put structures around the support given to staff. It doesn't take much to convince management that this is important –the difficult part is in the work and the doing. ●

LOOKING UP

The observatory that discovered Pluto has a new $53m Astronomy Discovery Center, and it's unlike any other. Magali Robathan finds out more



Percival Lowell used the famous Clark Telescope to observe Venus and Mars

PHOTO: RAYMOND DAKE PHOTOGRAPHY/LOWELL OBSERVATORY

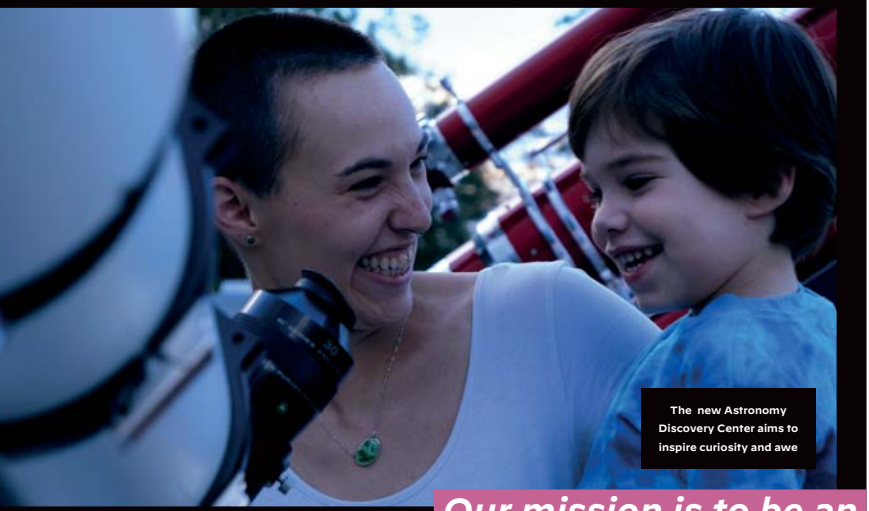


IMAGE: LOWELL OBSERVATORY

The new Astronomy Discovery Center aims to inspire curiosity and awe

Our mission is to be an accessible and exciting place to discover the universe

IMAGE: LOWELL OBSERVATORY

Live presentations in the Dark Sky Planetarium teach visitors about the cosmos

IMAGE: LOWELL OBSERVATORY

Best known for the discovery of Pluto, as well as for the detection of the first evidence of the expanding universe, Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona has been connecting people to the skies since its establishment in 1894.

Since the 1950s, Lowell Observatory has worked with Flagstaff City Council to preserve the dark skies of Flagstaff and northern Arizona, and in 2001, Flagstaff was designated the world's first International Dark Sky City.

All of this makes Flagstaff something of a Mecca for stargazers. Now, with the opening of Lowell Observatory's new $53m Kempel and Ethel Marley Foundation Astronomy Discovery Center, it will become even more of a draw.

The 40,000sq ft facility is spread over three floors, and features a rooftop open-sky planetarium, an interactive children's science museum and the ultramodern Lowell Universe Theater.

THE DESIGN TEAM

The ADC design team was led by Lowell Observatory staff members **Samantha Gorney**, deputy director for education, and **David Sawyer**, technical project manager.

Interpretive planning & design partner: **Kei Space Design**

Architecture: **JWA Architects**

Construction management: **BEC Southwest**

A SENSE OF WONDER

"Every component of the ADC is built with the purpose of communicating the awesome and unexpected wonders of the universe," says Dr Jeffrey Hall, executive director, Lowell Observatory.

"At Lowell Observatory, we believe in the power of education to transform lives. The Astronomy Discovery Center adds to Lowell's mission to be an incredibly accessible and exciting place for people of all ages to discover the universe, and we hope it will ignite lifelong curiosity in everyone who comes through its doors."

The 180-seat Lowell Universe Theater features a two-storey 160° curved 16K LED screen and a stage for interactive presentations from astrophysicists and other scientists. This will enable the centre to combine elements of a planetarium with live shows to bring astronomy alive for guests.

It's the Dark Sky Planetarium that sets the ADC apart from most astronomy centres – instead of using an indoor planetarium with a dome, the centre uses Flagstaff's dark skies

IMAGES: LOWELL OBSERVATORY

Top to bottom: Executive director Dr Jeffery Hall; COO Dr Armand Bosh; and director of education Dr Stephen Levine

PHOTO: ABE SNIDER/LOWELL OBSERVATORY

Lowell Observatory runs a series of events including the annual I Heart Pluto Festival

IMAGE: LOWELL OBSERVATORY

as a natural planetarium. Visitors sit in heated, slanted seats and look up at the night sky, while Lowell educators talk them through the stars, planets and constellations in live presentations.

The centre features three main galleries: the Origins Gallery, featuring a dramatic suspended centrepiece exploring the evolution of the universe; the Astronomy Gallery – Stardust Lab, with interactive exhibits for adults and older children, and the Orbits Curiosity Zone, which aims to bring astronomy to life for younger children with interactive displays and exhibits.

"The Astronomy Discovery Center embodies the spirit of exploration and discovery that has been at the heart of Lowell Observatory for more than a century," says Lowell Observatory's COO, Dr Amanda Bosh. "This centre will inspire awe and curiosity in visitors of all ages."

"This new facility will be a gateway to critical thinking through study of the cosmos with the goal of increasing scientific literacy," says Dr Stephen Levine, director of education at Lowell Observatory. "By engaging visitors in hands-on activities and immersive presentations, we aim to ignite a lifelong passion for science and exploration." ●

IMAGE: LOWELL OBSERVATORY

Highlights include the Universe Theatre and Dark Sky Planetarium

- **LOWELL UNIVERSE THEATER**
  180-seats, 16K, 160° curved LED screen, stage for interactive presentations
- **DARK SKY PLANETARIUM**
  Rooftop deck, heated seats, audio/visual components, constellation tours
- **ORBITS CURIOSITY ZONE**
  Accessible interactive exhibits for ages 0-8, climbing wall, engaging educational games
- **ASTRONOMY GALLERY**
  Accessible interactive exhibits, for ages 9+ exploring the wonders of the universe and our place in it
- **PRISM HALL AND LOBBY**
  Skylight that refracts rainbow patterns onto the floor
- **STARRY SKIES SHOP**
  Unique souvenirs to commemorate a visit
- **PLANET X CAFE**
  First-ever campus eatery, indoor and outdoor seating, fireplace
- **GREAT PLANETARY HALL**
  Space reserved for exclusive events and private parties
- **SKYLIGHT TERRACE**
  Outdoor area where guests can rest and enjoy sweeping views of Flagstaff before entering the Dark Sky Planetarium

While the Windrush generation has helped to shape Britain, there has been no museum dedicated to telling its stories – until now. The director of the National Windrush Museum shares her aims with Magali Robathan

Denize Ledeatte

PHOTO: FARUK BARAN CIRAKOĞLU@ VIA CARBY & CO EVENT SERVICES

The NWM recently hosted Windrush elders from Wales at Queen's House, London

'Windrush history is British history'

Last year (2023) marked 75 years since the Empire Windrush arrived in the UK, with the ship now symbolic of the generation that journeyed from the Caribbean to Britain to settle and help rebuild the country following the Second World War.

In the decades since its arrival, the Windrush generation and their descendants have helped shape Britain. However, until now, there has been no museum dedicated to documenting this community, its history and its impact on Britain.

The idea for the National Windrush Museum was developed by Dr Les Johnson, an academic whose work centres on the concept of cultural visualisation – the idea that culture and heritage can be visualised in new, innovative and creative ways. With museums playing a key role in how people understand history and culture, Dr Johnson was keen to explore the way existing institutions were promoting cultural diversity, and to find new ways of telling the stories of under-represented groups.

"Windrush pioneers were dying and as a result of institutional racism their history, hard work and contributions were being passed over, leaving no legacy or evidence of their presence in Britain," said Dr Johnson.

While the need for a Windrush museum was clear, the idea hadn't progressed beyond the conceptual stage until 2020. In a conversation between Denize Ledeatte and Dr Johnson, they realised that their mothers had both died during the same year. Speaking to more of their peers who were descendants of the Windrush generation, they found many others had also lost their mothers during that year. ▸

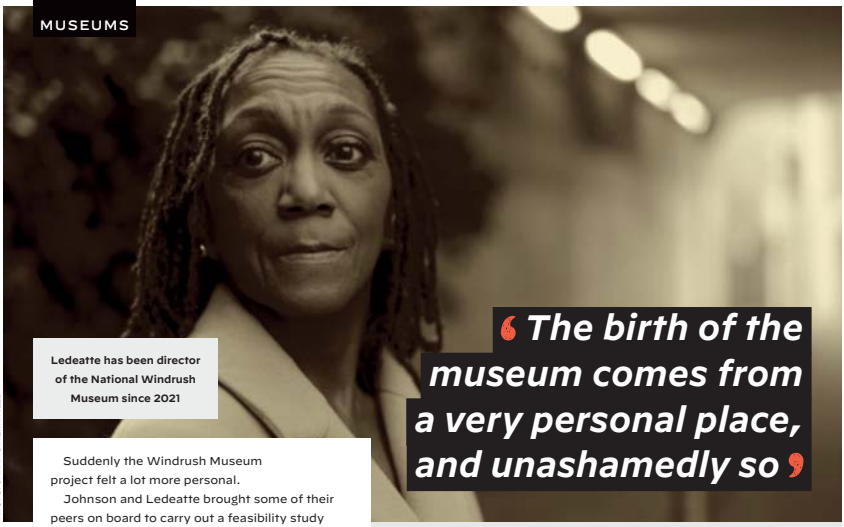


PHOTO: SARAH C MERRIFIELD

Ledeatte has been director of the National Windrush Museum since 2021

> ***'The birth of the museum comes from a very personal place, and unashamedly so'***

Suddenly the Windrush Museum project felt a lot more personal.

Johnson and Ledeatte brought some of their peers on board to carry out a feasibility study and try to realise the potential of the idea. At an early meeting, Dr Johnson described walking along a beach and looking back to see his footsteps disappearing in the sand. He equated that to his parents' generation and the fact that their contributions were being lost.

"This image really struck us," Ledeatte tells *Attractions Management*. "That was the feeling that we all shared – that our mothers had been in the UK for decades, but where was their contribution documented? Why wasn't there a place that we could take our children to show them something of their grandparents?

"The birth of the museum comes from a very personal place, and unashamedly so."

These conversations brought a sense of urgency to the project and a recognition that time was running out to capture the testimony and experiences of the Windrush generation.

The National Windrush Museum was launched in October 2021, with Dr Johnson's Foundation providing seed capital. It is currently funded through a range of sponsors, grants, donations and earned income. Its aim is to research, exhibit, publish and preserve the cultural heritage of the Windrush generation, their antecedents and successors.

On 24 November 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed at the House of Lords in London between the National Windrush Museum and Royal Museums Greenwich, and a collaboration between the Windrush Museum and the National Maritime Museum was announced.

PHOTO: FARUK BARAN ÇIRAKOĞLU© VIA CARBY & CO EVENT SERVICES

The National Windrush Museum hosts a varied programme of events

Josephine's Incredible Journey explores Black British history

PHOTO: @JORDANPITTPHOTOGRAPHY

MP Seema Malhotra visits NWM at its premises at Royal Museums Greenwich

PHOTO: @NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON

‘In the longer term, we plan to have our own permanent standalone museum’

Here museum director Denize Ledeatte speaks to Attractions Management about the plans for the museum

PHOTO: ©NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON

Why is it so important to have a museum dedicated to the Windrush experience?

In 2021, we undertook a feasibility study, and found that while there are more than 2,500 museums in the UK, there are none dedicated to Windrush, or which permanently document Windrush. That means that there are 2,500 ways for the nation to tell its story about who it is, and who it thinks it is. That does something for a nation and its identity. We had none of that – we just had this huge void.

Windrush history is British history, so the fact that it is absent from all of those narratives means that a really important part of the story is missing.

How is the National Windrush Museum organised?

The museum has four pillars: An international conference, a festival, awards and a memorial. The rationale behind these four pillars is that in 10 years we’ll have footage and coverage of 10 conferences and festivals, so we’re in effect creating our own archival material through the events that we’re delivering.

This summer we also ran a series of lectures as part of the International Windrush Conference at Royal Museums Greenwich, with entrepreneur Levi Roots and former Royal College of Nursing CEO Dame Donna Kinnair giving the inaugural lectures.

Events are central to what we do – they unlock stories and contributions, and then we can collate and preserve those stories. After the lectures, many people came up to us and said they wanted to tell their stories. Before that, they thought no-one would be interested in what they had to say.

Our headquarters are based at the Royal Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London. We’re currently working on our first major exhibition, which will take place within the National Maritime Museum. We’re also exploring how we can embed the Windrush narrative across the existing Royal Museums Greenwich sites – the Observatory, the Cutty Sark, the National Maritime Museum, Queen’s House and Prince Philip’s Collection Centre – to give a more representative view of British maritime history.

In the longer term, we plan to have our own permanent standalone museum.

How do you plan to tell the stories?

Collections will be a key element of the museum. We’re focusing on building the collection at the moment. Right now, there’s a lot of infrastructure building – engaging with people who have artefacts at home.

We’re also working on a National Windrush Museum road tour, which will take place next year across the UK.

Why was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with Royal Museums Greenwich important?

That partnership is really significant because it allows us to grow and be mentored by an established national museum. It also allows us access to their resources and curators, and helps us build the infrastructure behind the scenes.

Royal Museums Greenwich is a good partner for us, because Windrush history is all about water and boats. From Africa to the Caribbean, and from the Caribbean to the UK – it’s all maritime history.

Windrush history is just British history. It’s part of the story of Britain. ●

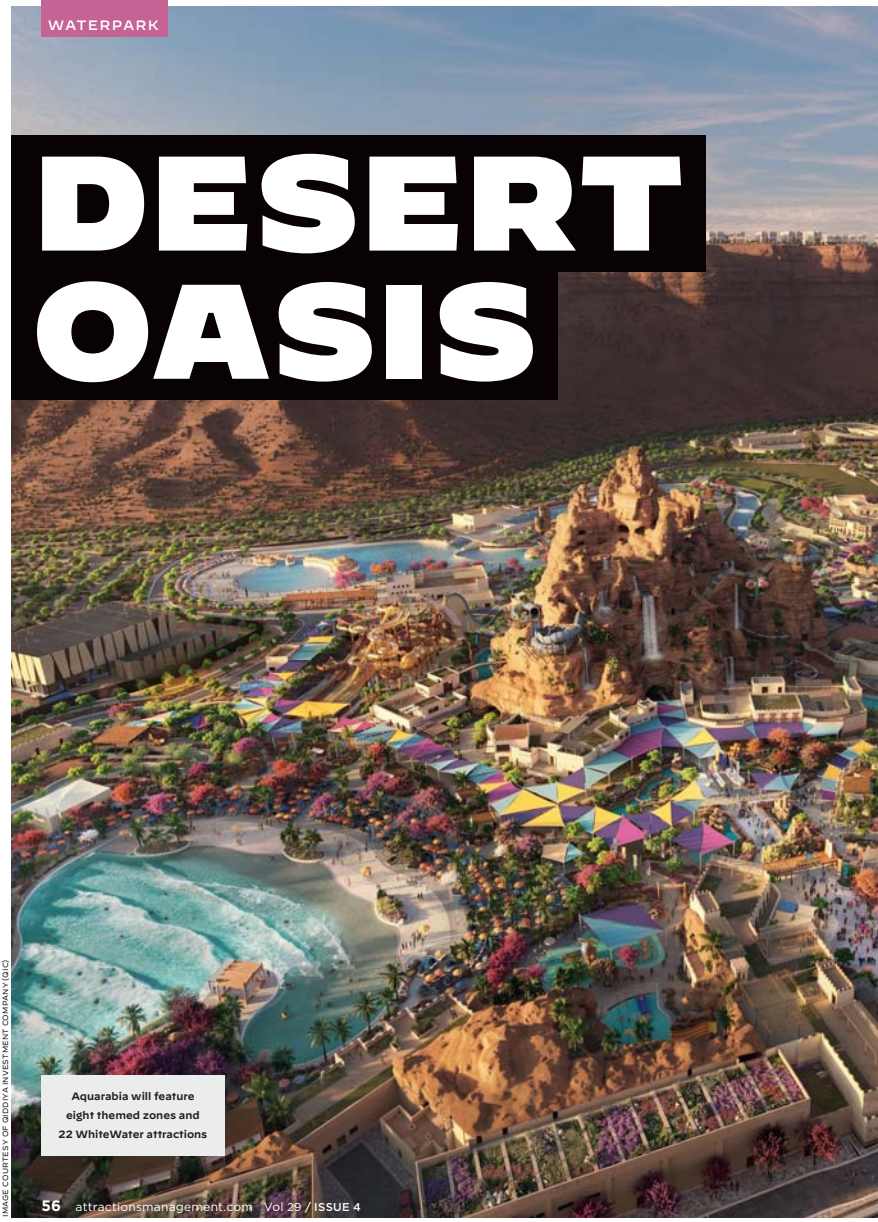
RMG also partners with the Caribbean Social Forum and other local organisations

PHOTO: @NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON

Royal Museums Greenwich hosts a programme of Windrush Day events

PHOTO: @NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM, GREENWICH, LONDON

DESERT OASIS



Aquarabia will feature eight themed zones and 22 WhiteWater attractions

IMAGE COURTESY OF QIDDIYA INVESTMENT COMPANY (QIC)

Construction is underway on Saudi Arabia's first major water theme park, and it's going to be huge. We find out all the latest details about Aquarabia

Qiddiya Investment Company, Falcon's Creative and WhiteWater have revealed details of the Aquarabia water attraction park set to open in 2025 as part of the Six Flags Qiddiya City theme park near Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. QIC is the developer and Falcon's is the masterplanner and attraction designer for the park.

Covering 250,000sq m, the park will feature eight different animal-inspired zones, with 22 attractions designed by waterpark manufacturer WhiteWater. Each zone will celebrate its designated animal via themed attractions and design, from huge sculptures of Arabian horses to the Camel Rock Mountain rock formation at the heart of the park.

The eight themed areas include Camel Rock, with five attractions including the Lazy Camel River Ride; Surf Lagoon, featuring WhiteWater's Endless Surf wave pool; the Wave Wadi wave pool and white water rafting experience; and Herding Grounds, offering outdoor adventures including rock climbing and kayaking.

PHOTO: WHITEWATER

Mike Rigby

The park also features Arabian Peak – an adults-only water pool relaxation zone – and the Den, a serene area for women and children featuring soothing streams and splash pads.

Viper Canyon will house high octane attractions, from the Hyper Viper 15m plunge to the Tahiddi Viper racing slides.

"Aquarabia Qiddiya City is the most iconic waterpark currently in construction globally," says Mike Rigby, WhiteWater's general manager and regional vice president for Middle East, Africa & India. "We're deeply honoured to be a partner on this groundbreaking project, and eager to bring our innovative water slides, attractions, and experiences to this remarkable destination in Saudi Arabia." ▸

THE VISION

PHOTO: FALCON'S CREATIVE GROUP

Joe Schaefer

When masterplanning the park, Falcon's Creative Group decided that the vision needed to embrace Saudi culture while complementing the entire Qiddiya City site. They developed a storyline embracing some of Saudi Arabia's most iconic, indigenous wildlife, as well as the life-giving properties of water.

From waterfalls to caves and secret pathways, the design aims to integrate the park into the natural surroundings.

"The design of the park is built around the indigenous species of the region – the sweeping vast landscapes and the fact that water is the thing that connects all of us," says Joe Schaefer, vice president of technical design at Falcon's Creative Group.

"This is a park built around adventure and exploration. There are things here that have never been put into a waterpark before. You'll be able to go underwater in a capsule, and see the underwater world.

"There are mechanical slides, such as the slide wheel, competitive rock climbing, cliff diving, white water rafting."

WhiteWater's Endless Surf will allow visitors to try surfing and bodyboarding.

Qiddiya City project aims to establish a global entertainment and sports hub in Saudi Arabia. It is part of Saudi Vision 2030, a plan developed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's leaders to diversify the country's economy and reduce its dependency on oil. ●

IMAGE COURTESY OF QIDDIYA INVESTMENT COMPANY (QIC)

The Slithereel slide wheel ride (above) will be located in the Viper Canyon zone

Aquarabia water attractions

All 22 water attractions are being developed by WhiteWater. The attractions include:

- A Mat Blaster waterslide where guests will ride headfirst on a series of gravity-defying blasts
- FusionFortress 18, featuring 181 interactive play features, 11 water slides, two tipping buckets and a water geyser spraying 100 feet into the air
- Saudi Arabia's first inland surf pool, powered by Endless Surf technology
- An AquaLoop + Flatline Loop Fusion drop slide
- A Hyper Viper (or Shoot the Chute) water boat ride, featuring a 15-meter drop. WhiteWater has introduced unique lighting and spray features, enhancing the traditional Shoot the Chute experience.
- A Wadi Tahaddi (or Spinning Rapids) raft ride that sees groups of six set out on a 600m-long ride on a circular raft, experiencing intense centrifugal forces across a ride path of river trough elements combined with water slide fiberglass sections

This is a park built around adventure and exploration

IMAGE COURTESY OF QIDDIYA INVESTMENT COMPANY (QIC)

Aquariabia's eight themed zones

- **Camel Rock:** Perched high above the park's pools, Camel Rock's five attractions including the Camel Racers inner-tube slides and the Lazy Camel River ride
- **Viper Canyon:** This area is tailored to guests seeking an extreme adrenaline rush
- **Arabian Peak:** A quiet adults only retreat featuring tranquil leisure pools and private cabanas
- **Surf Lagoon:** A 'beachside oasis' featuring an Endless Surf surf pool, Surftopia, with four distinct wave patterns
- **The Den:** A secluded getaway for women and children, where families can relax amidst soothing streams and splash pads
- **Wave Wadi:** Aimed at adrenaline seekers, this zone features a state-of-the-art wave pool and the Wadi Tahaddi 600m white water rafting tubing experience
- **Herding Grounds:** From rock climbing to kayaking, this zone offers a range of outdoor adventures
- **Dhub Grotto:** A huge play fortress explicitly designed for children, featuring a wide range of slides and climbing structures

PLAY ON

One of 2024's most anticipated new attractions, Nintendo Museum has finally opened in Kyoto, Japan, showcasing play, heritage and creative re-imaginings of historic Nintendo games

This museum is a place where you can learn about our commitment to crafting play and creativity

IMAGE COURTESY OF NINTENDO MUSEUM

The museum features a giant card game based on historical Japanese poems

IMAGE COURTESY OF NINTENDO MUSEUM

The museum is on the site of the old Nintendo Ogura factory in Kyoto, Japan

Located on the site of a former Nintendo factory that made playing cards and repaired toys and consoles, the Nintendo Museum finally gives fans a place to discover and learn about the history of the Japanese video game company.

Founded in Kyoto in 1889 when craftsman Fusajiro Yamauchi began producing handmade hanafuda playing cards, Nintendo entered a partnership with the Walt Disney Company in 1959, opening up the children's market, and began manufacturing toys and video games in the 1960s and 1970s.

This history is celebrated in the new museum, via displays, interactive games and workshops.

"In more than 100 years since the company was founded, Nintendo has created many different forms of entertainment," said Nintendo game director Shigeru Miyamoto, introducing the museum.

"Although the products we've made have changed with the times, our desire to create fun for the whole family remains the same. This museum is a place where you can learn about our commitment to crafting play and creativity – both of which are integral to Nintendo. We hope to share this feeling with you when you visit the museum.

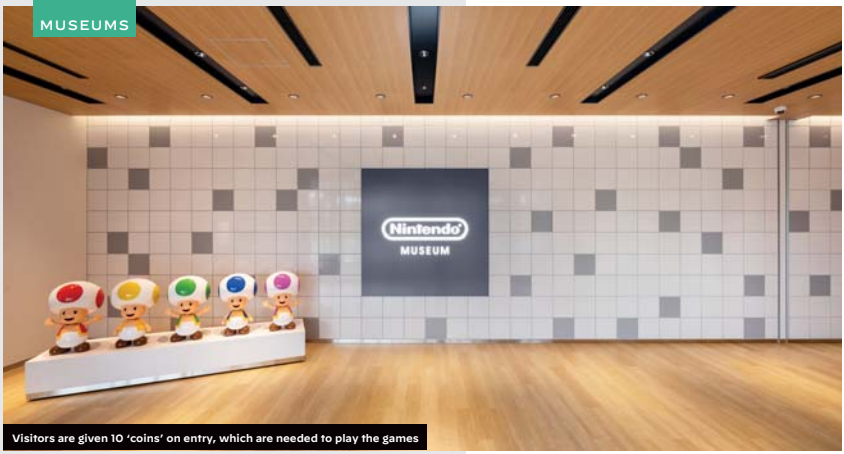


IMAGE COURTESY OF NINTENDO MUSEUM

Visitors are given 10 'coins' on entry, which are needed to play the games

> *Nintendo employees, including our developers, have put their all into developing and creating this space*

"Nintendo employees, including our developers, have put their all into developing and creating this space."

Visitors enter the museum via a Mario-themed Plaza. Inside, the museum is split into three sections: Learn, Experience, and Create and Play.

Mixing the old and new

The Experience section, on the first floor, features eight unique interactive games created especially for the museum. These are based on past Nintendo content, creatively reimagined using modern technology.

These experiences include a reinvention of the handheld electronic Game & Watch console on a huge screen operated by visitors' shadows, classic Nintendo games played via enormous controllers and an experience that allows visitors to explore classic Japanese Hyakunin Isshu poems using smart devices and a giant screen on the floor.

In the 1970s, Nintendo renovated bowling alleys, turning them into commercial shooting galleries called Laser Clay. For the museum, Laser Clay has been reinterpreted using light guns and video walls as a shooting game called Zapper and Scope SP, which can be played by up to 13 people at one time.

More than just video games

The second floor features the Learn section, with displays of products released by Nintendo, from early games and consoles up to its most recent releases, as well as toys, board games and sports and leisure products. Visitors will find some unexpected products among the better-known ones, including baby strollers, photocopiers and an indoor baseball pitching machine.

Gameplay footage is displayed on large screens of the video games on show above the products so that visitors can see them in action.

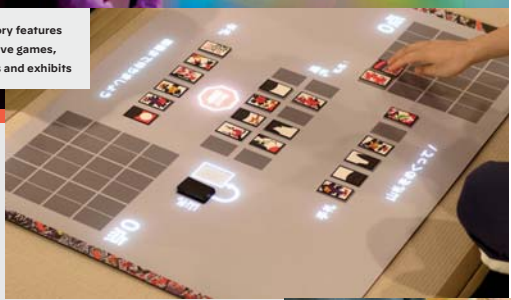
These products are deliberately showcased with little explanation, according to the museum designers, so that visitors can 'make connections and form their own thoughts about them'.

Getting creative

In the Create and Play section, visitors can make their own Hanafuda playing cards in special workshops, and they can play Hanafuda as part of a specially created experience that uses image recognition and projection technology, allowing even first-timers to play easily.

The museum also features a café, and – of course – a shop, selling official merchandise based on Nintendo games and characters, as well as products only available at Nintendo Museum. ●

The factory features interactive games, workshops and exhibits



IMAGES COURTESY OF NINTENDO MUSEUM

THE LOWDOWN

Where: Uki City, Kyoto, Japan

Cost: Tickets cost 3,300 yen (£17 $22) per adult

Exclusive play experiences:

Shigureden SP
Explore Hyakunin Isshu poems using smart devices and the giant screen on the floor.

Zapper & Scope SP
Experience shooting using the Zapper and Super Scope in the world of Mario that spreads out on the giant screen in front of you.

Ultra Machine SP
A batting-cage experience inside a room. Hit the balls pitched by the Ultra Machine.

Ultra Hand SP
Use the Ultra Hand to grab the balls rolling down the lanes, and drop them into the pipes.

Love Tester SP
Two people join hands and work together on tests that measure their Love Level.

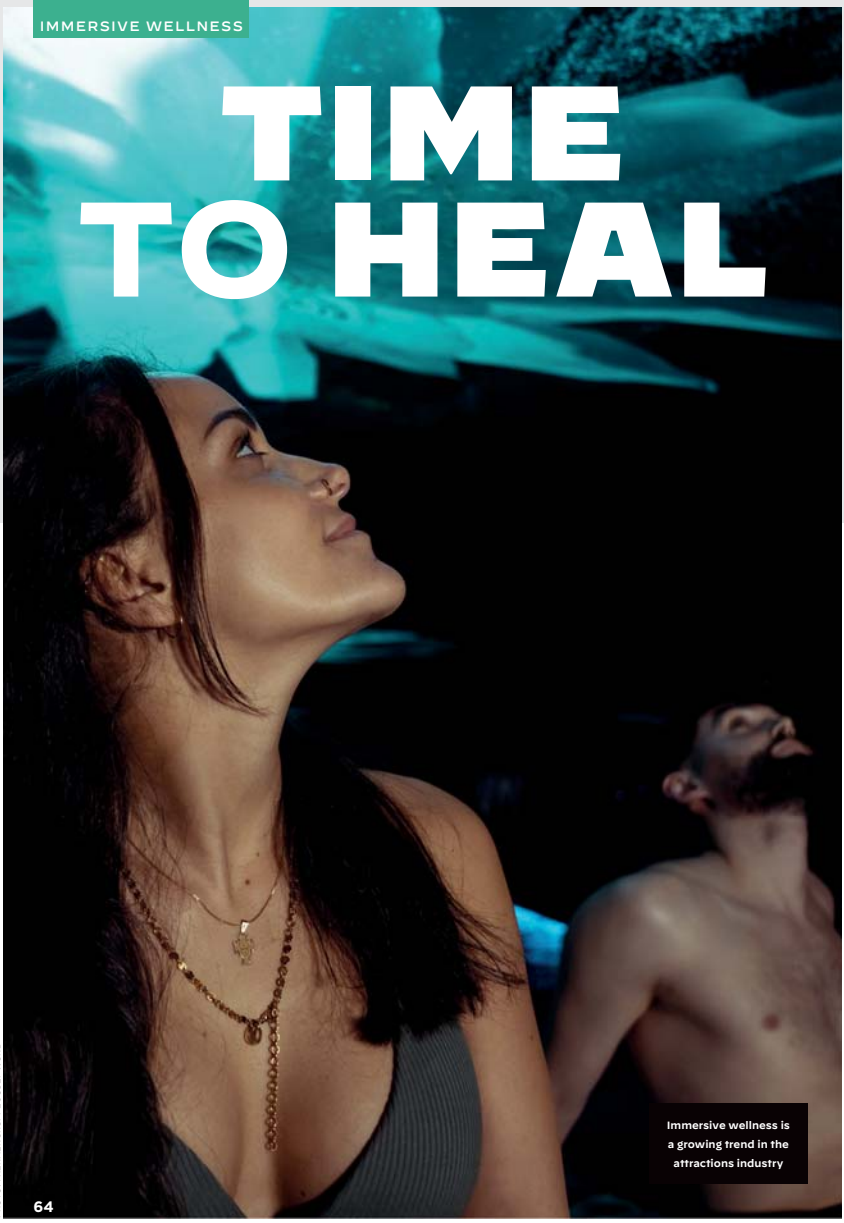
Game & Watch SP
Play Game & Watch games using your own shadow.

Nintendo Classics
Nintendo Entertainment System, Super Nintendo Entertainment System, Nintendo 64. Choose from over 80 games to play.

Big Controller
Controllers from past hardware generations made giant. Two people must work together to take on challenges in games released back in the day.

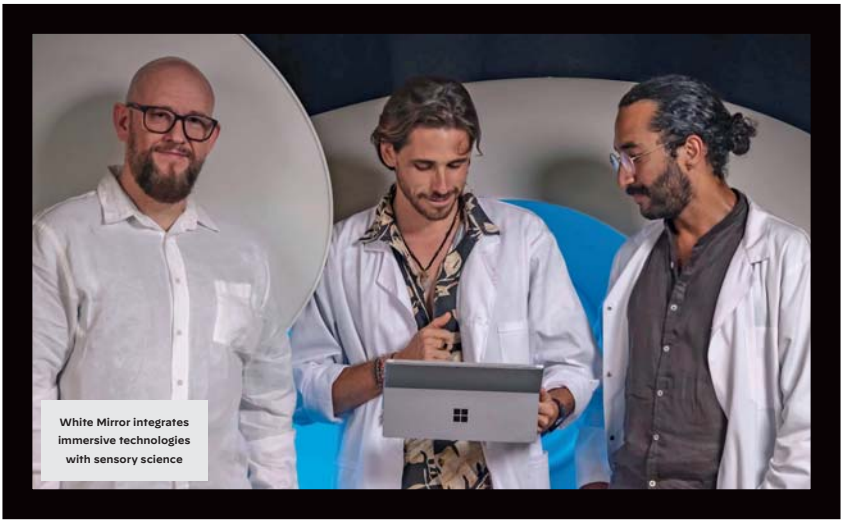
Visitors have the opportunity to make their own Hanafuda playing cards

TIME TO HEAL



Immersive wellness is a growing trend in the attractions industry

PHOTO: THERMENGRUPPE JOSEF WUND



White Mirror integrates immersive technologies with sensory science

PHOTO: WHITE MIRROR

Immersive experiences can transport and entertain us, but could they also help us heal? Innovation consultancy White Mirror thinks so, with its focus on the idea of experience as medicine, as Julie Cramer discovers

PHOTO: WHITE MIRROR

The firm has a neuroscience lab in Lisbon, Portugal

"One of our guiding principles is founded on the concept of 'experience as medicine'. How can we create immersive environments that also become therapeutic environments?" says Ramy Elnagar, co-founder of wellness innovation consultancy White Mirror.

The company, which has a creative studio in London and a neuroscience lab in Lisbon, has been involved in many next-level projects focused on technology-driven art, science and music since its formation four years ago.

Last issue in *Attractions Management*, we reported on the increasing crossover between the attractions and wellness industries, with a growing number of immersive projects focusing on wellbeing. We've reported on several water-based immersive experiences that straddle wellness and attractions – a recent White Mirror project brings multisensory levels of technology into the spa environment in a different way, with a virtual forest bathing experience.

A journey through the Amazon rainforest

Commissioned by Thermengruppe Josef Wund, with art collective Marshmallow Laser Feast (MLF) and experience designers TheLoveTriangle and White Mirror, Forest Bathing: Lupuna is an immersive virtual forest bathing experience for Therme Euskirchen near the city of Bonn.

Elnagar says: "Thermengruppe Josef Wund is passionate about bringing science and nature together and studying the effects of the biophilic environment on human wellbeing.

"They also understand the need to embrace technology to meet the expectations of an evolving audience."

Forest Bathing: Lupuna, named after the South American tree, takes visitors through 24 hours of the Amazon rainforest in 24 minutes. Elnagar explains: "You step into a waterfall that opens up as you approach, leading to a room filled with rain. The space features 360 degree sound with recordings from the Amazon. Using spatial sound design, you hear everything from the buzz of a mosquito passing close by to raindrops falling.

> ***"Thermegruppe Josef Wund is passionate about studying the effects of the biophilic environment on wellbeing***

"Next, you lay down on custom-designed lily pads. Overhead projectors display images ranging from wide-angle shots of towering trees to close-ups of the Queen of the Night, a flower that blooms just before dawn once a year. The space is carefully designed to engage and instil calm without overwhelming the senses."

A meeting of minds

The team behind these concepts by White Mirror includes co-founder Tom Middleton, a wellness music pioneer and sleep science coach who's performed on global stages with stars such

Thermengruppe Josef Wund, White Mirror and Marshmallow Laser Feast

PHOTO: THERMENGRUPPE JOSEF WUND

White Mirror helped create virtual forest bathing experience Lupuna

PHOTO: THERMENGRUPPE JOSEF WUND

as Lady Gaga and Mark Ronson. Elnagar is a hybrid business strategist with a background in virtual and augmented reality and AI.

Research director Francisco Teixeira is a neurotech consultant who oversees the company's Portugal-based research lab, where clients can validate their products and services before taking them to market. Meanwhile, artistic director Arianne Amores focuses on creating stunning visual concepts for brands.

Elnagar had his own tech company before meeting Middleton at a sleep conference. Soon after, the idea for White Mirror was born. He says: "Tom was performing music but wanted to focus on creating 'music for purpose'. He's a very kind soul who's all about helping people. I was having my own purpose crisis and grappling with how we could create 'tech for good'. We knew we had to work together."

Research methods

Behind the creation of such multi-layered immersive environments is research that monitors effects like reduced stress, greater relaxation, deeper sleep and enhanced sense of wellbeing.

Elnagar says: "Our lab examines psycho-physiological effects, such as heart rate, breathing patterns, brain activity, emotional arousal and galvanic skin response while the experience is happening. We also monitor how people feel before and after, using biometrics as well as pre- and post-questionnaires."

White Mirror also recently facilitated a relationship between Thermengruppe Josef Wund and the International Arts and Minds Lab (IAMLAB) neuroaesthetics team at Johns Hopkins University in the US. This has resulted in ongoing research looking at what it is about light, sound and vibrations that make us feel good. The findings are due to be published by the end of this year, explains Elnagar.

"From this, we hope to develop a sensory playbook to share across industries," he adds, "to help us all deliver more intentional wellness-orientated spaces."

Awe-inducing experiences

One thing that both the attractions and wellness communities have seen since the isolation of lockdown is people's increased desire for more meaningful social engagements, which is something that White Mirror's work seeks to address.

Elnagar says: "We look at how we can use art, science and music to open people up so that they can feel more and become healthier as a result. ●

THE POWER OF PLAY

Kyle Morrand believes video game designers can change the attractions industry… and the world. The founder of 302 Interactive shares his vision

Kyle Morrand founded video game development studio 302 Interactive in 2014

You started out as a game designer. How does the world of game design impact immersive attractions?

Game design is all about giving people agency – creating spaces where they can make choices and do things they wouldn't normally get to do in real life. It's like opening a door to a whole new set of actions and experiences.

By bringing game design principles into attractions, we shift the experience from something you just watch into something you're fully a part of. Instead of being a passive viewer in a themed show or exhibit, you get to interact with the space, make decisions, and feel like you're really in the middle of the action. It's like taking the excitement and immersion of games and dropping it into real-world environments. So, instead of just experiencing an attraction, visitors get to live it. It's a whole new level of fun and engagement.

What attractions work do you do at 302 Interactive?

At 302 Interactive, a lot of our work in attractions is about creating intuitive, interactive experiences by blending traditional game design with emerging technology. We're always looking for ways to bridge that gap and give guests something that feels natural and fun to engage with. We've worked with various XR devices and combined them with physical displays and spaces to fully immerse people into an experience that makes them want to come back for more.

We've worked on confidential projects for some of the world's largest theme parks and developed our own projects for independent venues such as virtual reality escape rooms.

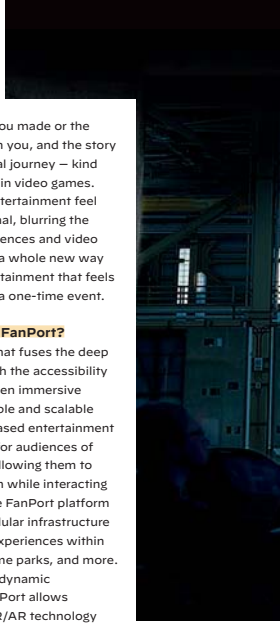
One of the projects we're really excited about is FanPort – a platform designed for immersive social experiences. It creates a whole new level of interaction for guests, and we're already in talks with a few venues to activate their spaces with it. We've got some exciting partnerships in the works that'll push what's possible in attractions.

Game design is all about giving people agency—creating spaces where they can make choices

PHOTO: 302 INTERACTIVE

PHOTO: DRAW & CODE

PHOTO: DRAW & CODE



How is 4DX revolutionizing attractions? How might the use of 4DX in the attractions market evolve?

4DX changes the game by activating more of your senses while you're watching a story unfold. Instead of just seeing and hearing the action, you can feel it—through things like motion, scents, and even changes in the environment around you. This makes the experience feel way more immersive overall.

We've already seen larger attractions like Disney and Universal play around with smells, motion, and other sensory effects to pull you deeper into the experience. The exciting part is that as 4DX tech evolves, we'll likely see these kinds of experiences become more accessible for smaller attractions too. That means more venues will be able to offer these multi-sensory adventures, taking the idea of immersive attractions to a new level across the wider industry.

What other immersive technologies do you see revolutionising attractions?

One area I'm really excited about is using technology to create more connected and personalised experiences in attractions. Instead of going bigger and flashier, I'd love to see experiences that carry over from one attraction to the next, where your past interactions actually influence the story you're a part of. Imagine an attraction where the choices you made or the things you did earlier stick with you, and the story evolves based on your personal journey — kind of like how progression works in video games.

This would make themed entertainment feel a lot more dynamic and personal, blurring the line between real-world experiences and video game adventures. It opens up a whole new way of engaging with themed entertainment that feels more meaningful and less like a one-time event.

Can you tell us more about FanPort?

FanPort is a social attraction that fuses the deep immersion of mixed reality with the accessibility and social connection of an open immersive space. FanPort is a customisable and scalable spatial platform for location-based entertainment venues to create experiences for audiences of between four and 16 people, allowing them to see the real world around them while interacting with incredible 3D scenes. The FanPort platform provides the portable and modular infrastructure for branded extended reality experiences within sports venues, museums, theme parks, and more.

Using mixed reality glasses, dynamic lighting, and spatial audio, FanPort allows attraction operators to take VR/AR technology and create immersive experiences that can exist anywhere. Museums, for example, can incorporate interactive installations that allow patrons to connect directly with the artwork,

I'm excited about using technology to create more connected and personalised experiences

PHOTO: LITTLE LION ENTERTAINMENT LTD

Little Lion Ents' Chaos Karts blurs the line between video game and live entertainment

Futuroscope is one of many theme parks that have begun to feature 4D experiences

PHOTO: FUTUROSCOPE

signage, and each other, while still seeing the world around them. Theme parks can reduce the strain of wait times by providing guests with AR games and trivia while standing in line. The possibilities are endless.

What excites you most about this project?

For me, the most exciting part of FanPort is how it blends physical theatre with digital interactions. It's not just about the tech – it's about creating a seamless experience where the real world and the digital world interact in a way that feels natural. Bringing those two elements together allows people to immerse themselves in the story, while still feeling connected to the space they're in.

What trends do you see in your sector?

One big trend we're following is how the 'why' behind playing games is evolving. It's no longer just about playing for fun or killing time – people are gaming for all kinds of reasons now, like fitness, mental health, education, relaxation, and even storytelling. This shift is huge for the attractions industry because it opens up so many more opportunities to blend entertainment with everyday goals.

Now we can start thinking about how to bring playful, interactive experiences into places like the gym, the classroom, or even theatres in ways that feel natural and meaningful. It's about making everyday life more playful and immersive, and that's where I think the next wave of innovation is going to happen. ●

FanPort was launched in June 2024

PHOTO: DRAW & CODE

FANPORT

Launched by emerging technology development studios Draw & Code and 302 Interactive, FanPort combines a large LED screen or video-mapped display with AR glasses to allow holographic content to travel through portals into a shared physical experience space for four or more people.

DOMINIC JONES

With a background in themed entertainment, the CEO of the Mary Rose Trust has brought his commercial nous to the job, introducing a game-changing partnership and innovative technologies on a budget. Magali Robathan finds out more

When I visit the Mary Rose with my family, we enter Portsmouth Historic Dockyard (PHD) via an entrance shared by the Mary Rose, the HMS Victory and HMS Warrior ships, where we're welcomed by Mary Rose and National Museum of the Royal Navy staff working side by side. We pick up our tickets – which allow us access to all three ships, as well as to a range of other dockyard attractions – from a central visitor centre, and grab a coffee from the shared café.

Marketing is shared, with recent creative campaigns including a race across the UK's south coast between Henry VIII, Queen Victoria and Admiral Lord Nelson – and the website shows how the timeline of the ships fits together to help tell the story of British maritime history.

This joined up approach is thanks to an award-winning joint partnership between the Mary Rose Trust and the National Museum of the Royal Navy introduced in 2020.

"Combining the stability of a national museum with the entrepreneurial drive of an independent museum has been a huge success," says Jones. "We haven't looked back."

GOING IT ALONE

It hasn't always been like this. When Jones joined the Mary Rose Trust from Merlin Entertainments in November 2018 (as COO), there was fierce competition between the Mary Rose and the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Jones joined other staff members hustling for business out on the docks, shoving leaflets into potential visitors' hands and jumping onto coaches to try and persuade tourists to choose their museum.

"It was stressful for customers and tough for us," Jones tells me. "Working in partnership provides a much better experience for visitors, and it has bought us financial stability."

The joint partnership is just one of the changes initiated by Jones, who has used his commercial background to help drive visitor numbers, attract new audiences and introduce a range of technologies to better tell the story of Henry VIII's flagship, which sank in 1545, and was brought to the surface 437 years later in a televised salvage operation watched by an estimated 60 million people worldwide.

A NEW APPROACH

"I'm not your traditional museum person. The fact I got the job was a miracle," Jones ▸

Dominic Jones joined the Mary Rose Trust in 2018 and become CEO in 2021

©HARVEY MILLS

Moving into heritage has been a steep learning curve

says. "Most of the people I meet came up through the curatorial ranks, and they tend to have studied at Oxford or Cambridge."

Jones, in contrast, went to a college in Swansea – "which I loved" – and started his career working on a placement at Walt Disney World in Florida, US. He went on to receive a Mousters certificate as part of Disney's international college programme before taking a job as a ride operator at Thorpe Park in the UK.

"Some of my friends saw operating the teacups at Thorpe Park as a real waste of my degree, but I knew I wanted to run a theme park, and it was important to learn how everything worked," he says.

Jones achieved his aim, going on to run several theme parks – including Thorpe Park – and his career also saw him working as customer services manager for Madame Tussauds, holding various positions at Merlin including regional general manager for Europe, and spending eight years working in senior positions for Virgin Atlantic Airways.

With this varied background, Jones was able to bring a different – and arguably more commercial – approach to the Mary Rose.

"Moving into heritage has been a steep learning curve, but one that's been full of opportunities to take the theme park and commercial visitor attraction model and bring it into the heritage world," he says.

TURNING THINGS AROUND

Jones was appointed chief executive of the Mary Rose Trust in March 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"At that point, it was all about survival," he says. "The Mary Rose is an independent museum; we don't get any government or public funding – 84 per cent of our money comes from ticket sales, and the rest from private donations, trusts and foundations. Like many museums, we were struggling financially.

"We realised that the only way we could ensure the future of the Mary Rose was to change our approach to a more collaborative one."

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The Mary Rose is home to the world's largest collection of Tudor artefacts

©THE MARY ROSE TRUST

The Dockyard is one of the UK's top three paid attractions outside London

PHOTO: ALIEMRE GOLOGLU

This realisation led to an innovative joint venture between the National Museum of the Royal Navy and the Mary Rose Trust, which sees Portsmouth Historic Dockyard's attractions jointly operated and marketed.

"It was a win for everyone," says Jones. "The National Museum of the Royal Navy was amazing, and they have the advantages of being a national museum. Meanwhile, as an independent museum, we were quite nimble and commercial, and we could add value to them."

"We introduced decoy pricing, tracked our audiences in new ways and changed our marketing strategy – all of these things were different to the way the National Museum of the Royal Navy had previously operated."

Since launching the partnership, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard has seen a steady increase in visitor numbers year on year, attracting more than 870,000 visitors in 2023, up 21 per cent from the previous year. Last year, the Dockyard was named as one of the top three visited paid attractions in the UK outside London, after Stonehenge and the Roman Baths. And in May 2024, Portsmouth Historic Dockyard won Partnership of the Year at the Museum + Heritage Awards.

"We beat Bletchley Park Trust and their Rishi Sunak's partnership – can you believe it?" says Jones, clearly delighted. "I was blown away to get that award."

GETTING CREATIVE

Having worked for Disney and Merlin, Jones was familiar with the techniques employed by the themed entertainment industry, and keen to use what he'd learned to attract more visitors to the Mary Rose. The budget didn't stretch to the more expensive technologies he was used to, however, meaning the team had to get creative.

Jones and the team developed Experience 1545 during lockdown, with the aim of setting the scene as visitors enter the Mary Rose, and helping them to better understand the history before seeing the ruins of the ship and the genuine Tudor artefacts displayed.

"Lots of people thought that the Mary Rose sank during its maiden voyage, like the Titanic. In fact it was a very successful warship, serving for 34 years. It was one of Henry VIII's favourite ships, and it represented the start of the Royal Navy.

"We wanted to find a way to get all of that across. Initially I suggested doing a hologram but we couldn't afford it. Instead, we got an actor to play Henry VIII and screened it on the biggest tv we could find. It really works – you get the same effect as a hologram but without the cost.

"We pulled out all the stops with Experience 1545," he adds. "Dame Judi Dench did the voiceover at the start of the experience for free, which meant that we got a load of PR. We spent money on the latest technology to create an immersive experience giving visitors a taste of what it might have been like to be on the Mary Rose when it sank. We did product launches and customer engagement nights – we even got some of the people from *Love Island* to come down to the experience."

4D THEATRE

The next big launch came in 2023, with the introduction of a new 4D theatre experience, Dive the Mary Rose 4D.

"We have an amazing museum, with more than 19,000 genuine artefacts," says Jones. "We tell the story of everyday Tudor life really well, but we hadn't told the modern day story of the finding, excavation and raising of the Mary Rose.

"I wanted to create a 4D theatre; not a gimmicky theme park one – which I also love, by the way – but one that has authenticity and that tells a real story."

Dive the Mary Rose 4D launched in Easter 2023, using 3D cinema and the latest gaming technology, with smell, sound and movement used to enhance the experience.

"I'm incredibly proud of that experience," says Jones. "It was a real passion project, and it has real authenticity."

The Mary Rose includes a number of activities aimed at bringing the story to life

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The Many Faces of Tudor England

NEW WAYS OF TELLING STORIES

The Many Faces of Tudor England explored the diversity of the crew on board the Mary Rose.

The exhibition showcased research from a team including archaeologists, biochemists, chemists, geneticists, genealogists, geologists, historians and sculptors, who undertook forensic examinations of eight of the crew.

Using multi-isotype analysis to study their teeth, researchers were able to suggest where these individuals spent their early years. Food and water consumed in childhood leaves chemical signatures within the teeth, providing information on climate, underlying geology and the type of food consumed.

The research showed as many as three of the eight crew may have originated from more southerly climates than Britain, including the southern Mediterranean, Iberia and North Africa. Researchers say the remaining five crew members were likely to have been born in Britain. Analysis of the DNA extracted from one of these indicates that although he was born in Britain, his father was from North Africa or the near East.

The Mary Rose Museum is currently exploring the idea of creating a travelling exhibition of the Many Faces of Tudor England.

©THE MARY ROSE TRUST-STEPHEN FOOTE

Multi-isotype analysis allowed researchers to find out more about the crew

AUTHENTIC STORIES

Authenticity is a key priority for Jones and for the Mary Rose, and it was vital for the team to make the 4D experience feel as real as possible.

"We're custodians of authenticity," says Jones. "It's our USP. We're not interpreting what we think Tudor life on the Mary Rose would have been like – we have the actual artefacts, we've done the research. We believe the carpenter was Spanish because we've done isotope analysis on him, we know that he played backgammon. Everything is authentic.

"We'd come up with this concept of the importance of being custodians of authenticity as we were about to launch the 4D theatre. We had to stop and check ourselves – to ask whether it really was authentic.

"The launch poster was blue, but actually, the Solent is green. We spent three days getting the colour green right.

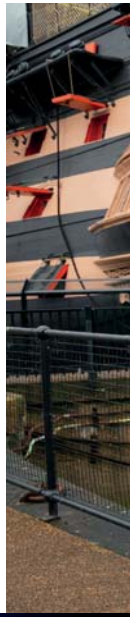
"We engaged with 160 of the original 500 divers, and we got actors to voice their commentary. When we got the footage back, it just didn't feel right, so we delayed the launch and recut it with the authentic voices of the real divers."

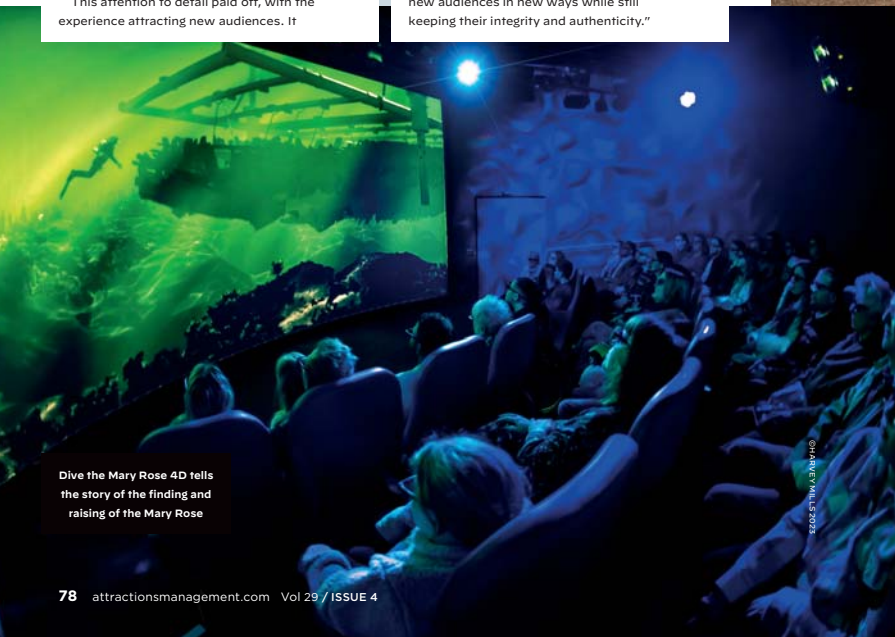
This attention to detail paid off, with the experience attracting new audiences. It won Best New Use of Technology at the 2024 Museum + Heritage Awards.

> ***The 4D theatre is probably my favourite part, because I'm so proud of it***

"I love everything about the Mary Rose Museum, but the 4D theatre is probably my favourite part, because I'm so proud of it," says Jones. "Divers like it, the rollercoaster community likes it, my kids like it. I watched it with an 85-year-old veteran and he loved it.

"It was a real passion project and it shows how museums can tell stories to new audiences in new ways while still keeping their integrity and authenticity."





Dive the Mary Rose 4D tells the story of the finding and raising of the Mary Rose

©HARVEY MILLS 2025

Visitors can buy a joint ticket for the Royal Historic Dockyard attractions

PHOTO: ALIEMRE GOLOGLU

LOOKING AHEAD

"We're at the start of a new journey," says Jones. "Our first three year strategy was about surviving the pandemic.

"The next five year plan is all about lasting financial sustainability. We've developed some key strategic objectives, which include building our significance, locally, nationally and internationally; delivering innovative and effective outreach programmes; and embedding environmental sustainability into everything we do.

"We're looking at lots of ideas to help us deliver these objectives."

As I talk to Jones, the ideas burst out of him. "We're working on putting together touring exhibitions – both in the UK, and we're in talks with Australia and America," he says.

"We're working on an exhibition called Pop Goes the Mary Rose, looking at the Mary Rose's influence in popular culture, from *Blue Peter* and *Only Fools and Horses* to Lego.

"We've got loads of ideas for that – we've commissioned a local graffiti artist to get involved. It'll be colourful, vibrant, different.

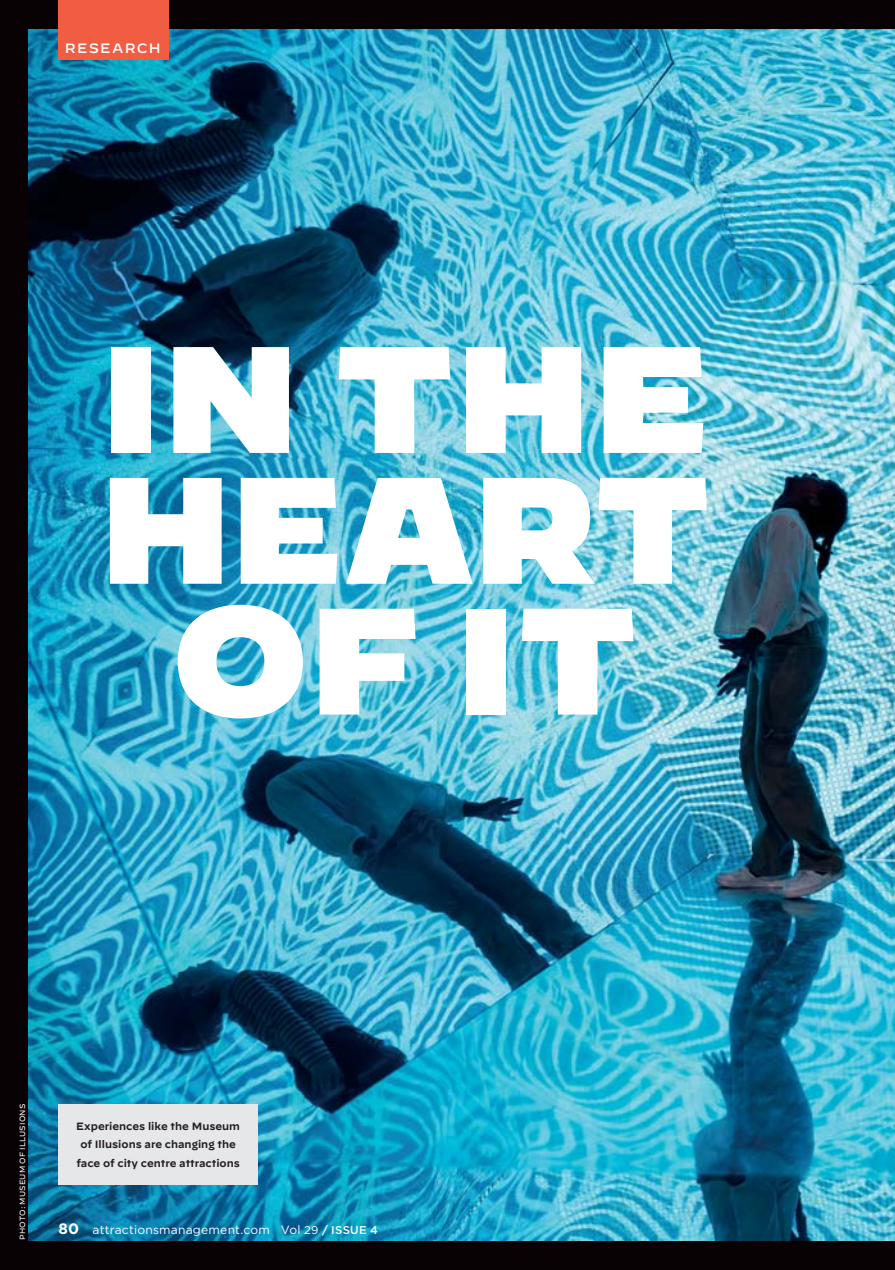
"In 2026, it's the centenary of Portsmouth being a city. We want to bring the city of Tudor Portsmouth to life – that will allow us to tell lots of different stories, including more female stories," he adds.

"In the longer term, we're working on what we're calling Mary Rose 2.0. It's all about opening up the starboard side (the complete side of the ship), so our guests can look at the other side. That will take a few years. In the meantime, we'll relaunch our science gallery, which will become the entrance to the starboard side."

At one point he takes a breath and says, laughing: "Can you tell I love the Mary Rose?"

I can. Jones' passion for the museum is very clear, and it's also clear that the story of the Mary Rose is far from over. The ship may be old, but her story continues to be told in new and exciting ways. ●

IN THE HEART OF IT



Experiences like the Museum of Illusions are changing the face of city centre attractions

PHOTO: MUSEUM OF ILLUSIONS

PHOTO: LISBETH HOLTEN

PHOTO: ANDREA MORETTI

Creative thinkers are changing the face of city centre attractions to meet the needs of tech-savvy, experience-hungry visitors. Mikkel Sonne and Lesley Morisetti explore the past, present and future for urban offers

Our journey with city centre attractions started when we both joined Madame Tussauds in London four decades ago, and throughout the years we have not only planned, developed and marketed these attractions, we've also visited a lot of them.

Over that time, visitors' behaviour and expectations of city centre attractions have changed in many ways, and these changes have shaped today's city centre attractions.

Audiences today are not passive viewers – they expect to be an integral part of the experience. They want to take control and tailor their visits to their own individual wants.

This need for agency covers all aspects of the experience: the booking procedure should be flexible, the design of the attraction should give a sense of exploration and discovery. This flexibility might come in the form of digital touchpoints where visitors choose between A and B, or immersive theatre where no two visits will be the same. Customisable merchandise or unique photo opportunities complete the experience.

Visitors' attention spans have diminished dramatically in the last 15 years, and even the most serious of historical sites and museums are incorporating elements from theme parks in their offer – such as storytelling, humour and drama – to keep their audiences' attention.

Today, some city centre attractions have become competition for bars and pubs, with the desire to do more than drink when meeting friends giving rise to a whole new genre of visitor experiences. These include competitive socialising venues such as Swingers indoor mini-golf, technology-led attractions like the Van Gogh Immersive exhibitions and illusion attractions like Twist in London, or the multi-site Museum of Illusions.

A new breed of entrepreneurs

Many of these newer concepts have been driven by developers from outside of the established attraction industry. MOCO's three museums of modern art were started by art dealers, others have been developed by entrepreneurs who started in other sectors, such as Layered Reality's Andrew McGuinness, who spent most of his career working in marketing communications before launching Jeff Wayne's The War of the Worlds: The Immersive Experience and The Gunpowder Plot in London.

These new entrants are highly aware of the growing power of social media and tend to start out as small, non-hierarchical organisations, able to move fast, gather feedback, and make

Annual Attendance			
	2006	2019	Av. growth per annum
Rundetaarn, Copenhagen (000's)	335	783	7%
Tower of London (000's)	2,084	2,984	3%

Source: ALVA, Copenhagen Tourist Board

There remains a strong appetite for authentic, location-relevant attractions

PHOTO: RICHARD LEA-HAIR/HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

rapid decisions, continuously adjusting and improving their offer to meet consumer demand.

So where does this rapid expansion in the number of city centre attractions leave the established attractions, the 'must sees' of each city? We looked at examples from our home cities of London and Copenhagen.

As the table on the left shows, both the Rundetaarn in Copenhagen and the Tower of London in London have grown attendance substantially over time (and both are showing strong recovery post-COVID-19). The reason for that growth is the correlation between how many tourists visit a city and how well their 'must see' attractions do. When London does well, the Tower of London does too and similarly for Copenhagen and the Rundetaarn.

So no, we don't think that 'must see attractions' have had their day, although the market is tougher than it used to be, and their enduring success also relies on their ability to keep their offer relevant to new audiences.

The role of location

In the past, when tourists tended to stick to the centre of a city armed with physical guidebooks, the mantra for attraction development was 'location, location, location'. Has the availability of real time city mapping on our phones has changed that?

Well, tourists are definitely more adventurous. We were two of the thousands who made

A new breed of operators has shaken up the city centre attractions market

PHOTO: TOM POWELL PHOTOGRAPHY

Today's visitors want to be part of an experience, rather than passive observers

PHOTO: LAYERED REALITY

their way out to the east of Paris to visit the immersive Van Gogh: Starry Night exhibition at Atelier des Lumiere in 2019, a location which a few years previously we'd have been wary of finding. The old drivers of depth of appeal and uniqueness of concept remain as important as ever, but the importance of location has perhaps dimmed a bit for all but those impulse attractions which need to be highly visible in order to convert passing tourists.

A different kind of growth

Growth isn't just about visitor numbers. We've seen some attractions intentionally aiming for fewer visitors by experimenting with their prices in order to achieve a higher profit margin per guest. Fewer visitors can mean less maintenance and higher guest satisfaction – combined with higher visitor spends, this has delivered a successful business model for many attractions.

This trend of focusing on value over volume accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when attractions had to restrict visitor numbers and experienced improvements in visitor satisfaction as a result. Since then, an increasing number have shifted from static pricing to variable pricing in order to optimise income from admissions.

The growth of online retail and decline of in-store shopping has been another factor in the rapid growth in new visitor attractions over the past few years, with more centrally located retail units available at somewhat more affordable rents. We've seen retail developers and city planners become more receptive to adding visitor experiences to the mix, at least in some cities.

Key challenges

The biggest challenges facing city centre attractions right now include availability of staff. The post pandemic desire for more flexible working conditions is challenging for an industry that relies on on-site staff to deliver guest experiences.

Some city centre attractions are also facing a new security challenge, with political protesters looking for high profile locations to get their messages across. The impact can be to further add to operating costs due to the need for increased security.

Cost of living challenges are affecting the industry, making it hard for operators to offset increasing operating costs through price increases, with visitors having to pay more for travel, catering and accommodation.

For city centre attractions reliant on international tourism, the impact of travel cost inflation is expected to be exacerbated over time by increased awareness of

the social and environmental costs of tourism and a growth in 'flight shame' hitting short break visits in particular.

Add to these factors the growing number of alternative visitor experiences available in city centres, and the challenges for the attractions industry seem rather daunting.

The future

We believe that visitor experiences will continue to grow in importance as a key driver of destinations, and an increasingly vital part of the mix, alongside retail and gastronomy.

But some consolidation of the industry is expected. Truly authentic attractions should do better than generic chains of attractions and museums, which could have a difficult time going forward. The demand for authentic, location-relevant attractions like Berlin's Spy Museum and the ABBA museum in Stockholm – those you could only find in the host city – is expected to be strong, as long as they remain relevant and up-to date.

The appeal of competitive socialising is expected to remain high, as young adults in particular continue to seek active leisure. And whilst the popularity of individual IP-led visitor experiences may shift over time, the concept of developing visitor experiences based on IPs is expected to continue. Similarly, the desire of brands to drive a deeper engagement with audiences in order to build advocacy, is expected to result in further development of brand homes, building on the success of existing brand homes such as Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, Heineken Experience in Amsterdam and Le Galerie Dior in Paris.

We're also likely to see more attractions based around food and drink evolve in the future, either as brand homes or as experiences where local food plays a main role.

Other directions of growth are expected to be influenced by aspects such as the desire for green spaces and outdoor communal venues, with the potential for greater audience participation in the upkeep and the ability to add educational stories to physical activity. Personal technology such as mobile phones is expected to shift further from being a distraction during visits to being an integral part of the experience (pre- and post-visit as well as during the visit).

A bright future

So, in conclusion, we remain positive about the future of the city centre attraction sector and its ability to rise to the challenges that we are seeing today.

Attractions must focus on staying relevant and maintaining appeal over time, ensuring that the visitor offer is authentic to the city, differentiated from the competition, and on clearly communicating their USPs. ●

PHOTO: EXHIBITION HUB

Location is not so critical for today's visitors, who are willing to travel to experiences

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PHOTO: TRENTHAM FOREST/N-GAGE.IO

The mobile app will deepen visitors' knowledge about the Barbary macaque monkeys

Trentham Monkey Forest teams up with n-gage.io to launch app

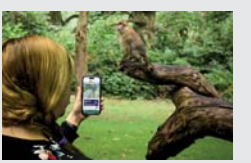

PHOTO: TRENTHAM FOREST/N-GAGE.IO

The UK's largest primate enclosure has launched an innovative mobile app designed to transform the visitor experience at the unique attraction.

Trentham Monkey Forest's new app has been developed by software specialists n-gage.io offering interactive features aimed at enhancing the visitor journey through the Staffordshire woodland.

As visitors wander through the forest, home to 140 playful Barbary macaques, the app's interactive map guides them to all the best spots. They can take part in quizzes, discover fascinating facts about the monkeys' behaviour and learn about the forest's wildlife.

Lisa Wardell, park manager at Trentham Monkey Forest, said: "We're very excited to launch this new app and offer our visitors an enhanced digital experience meaning people can now enjoy a more engaging, informative and memorable visit. This is a tool that will deepen the connection between visitors and our wonderful monkeys."

With the app, visitors will have access to the latest news, conservation campaigns and events. Trentham Monkey Forest works with organisations such as the Primate Society of Great Britain and Barbary Macaque Awareness and Conservation to protect this endangered species and this new app helps raise awareness while providing a fun, personalised experience.

Bryan Hoare, CEO of n-gage.io, added: "We're thrilled to support Trentham Monkey Forest with our technology, helping them bring conservation and education to life. The new app gives visitors a richer understanding of the monkeys and the forest, making every visit a unique adventure."

attractions-kit keyword
n-gage.io

IMAGE: VILLAGE ROADSHOW

The Wizard of Oz precinct is opening soon at Warner Bros' Movie World Australia

Vekoma showcases new openings

Ride manufacturer Vekoma showcased several new projects at IAAPA Europe in September.

Vekoma's new Wizard of Oz-themed rollercoaster Kansas Twister and suspended family coaster Flight of the Wicked Witch are set to open at the end of the year at Warner Bros. Movie World Australia's new Wizard of Oz land.

These two rides offer very different experiences: a family thrill suspended coaster experience, with an unobstructed flying sensation and high speed; and a racing shuttle coaster experience, with forward and backward runs, and a number of crossing and duelling.

Meanwhile, Dreamworld on the Gold Coast in Australia is launching what's been described as 'the world's first Switchback Coaster' Jungle Rush as part of its new Rivertown area. This family-thrill coaster features an inclined turntable, show sections and multi directional travel, and has been designed to support multiple different cycle paths. It will include 12 airtime elements, dedicated show moments and the ability to run both backwards and forwards.

Future projects include a new indoor family launch coaster, named Aquila, opening at the Polish theme park Mandoria in 2025 and the opening of the indoor family coaster Bulder Baan at new Netherlands indoor theme park Bommelwereld also in 2025.

attractions-kit keyword

Vekoma

IMAGE: VILLAGE ROADSHOW

IMAGE: VILLAGE ROADSHOW

The new Wizard of Oz-themed Flight of the Wicked Witch (top) and Kansas Twister (bottom)

IMAGE: P&P PROJECTS

Mormel is the first ThemedMotion show model

P&P Projects launches new brand and show model

P&P Projects has announced it is launching a brand-new branch called ThemedMotion that will specialise in the turnkey development of animatronics and animated figures.

According to P&P Projects, the launch "follows an exploration of commonly encountered issues and needs in this particular field of themed entertainment manufacturing. With a clear aim in its development, ThemedMotion will cultivate durability, reliability and innovation as its core values.

"ThemedMotion sets itself apart with a clear focus on a custom control system that allows for remote monitoring of performance. This is combined with ease of maintenance and seamless integration with show sets (due to P&P Projects' overarching expertise in this field)."

The company unveiled the first official ThemedMotion show model: Mormel. This model has been brought to life with 21 electrical actuators allowing for nearly 30 movements. It uses control software combined with a program developed by professional animators, resulting in a lifelike dynamic figure.

Celebrating its 35th anniversary in 2025, P&P Projects specialises in themeing, scenery, props, interactives, exhibits, animatronics, specials, scale models, and high quality interiors. Since 1989, the company has evolved into a design-build partner for the global themed entertainment industry, building a resumé of experience for a wide range of clients and partners, from theme parks and museums to resorts and cruise lines. Projects include Jurassic World Adventure at Universal Beijing Resort, Symbolica at Efteling and Smurfs Studio Tour at Motiongate Dubai.

Since its launch in 1989, the company has provided the turnkey design and production of themed entertainment experiences, all centred around immersive theming and physical thematic elements.

Dynamic, moving show pieces play an important role in this. It has been long-held ambition of the company to develop animated, motion-based elements in the same turnkey fashion.

"The launch of ThemedMotion can only be described as a rollercoaster ride," said a representative for P&P Projects at the launch of ThemedMotion.

"From start to finish, it's been an amazing experience." ●

IMAGE: P&P PROJECTS

P&P founder Philipp van Stratum

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P&P Projects

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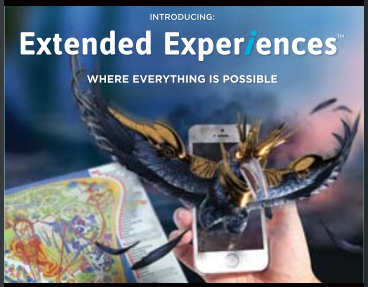

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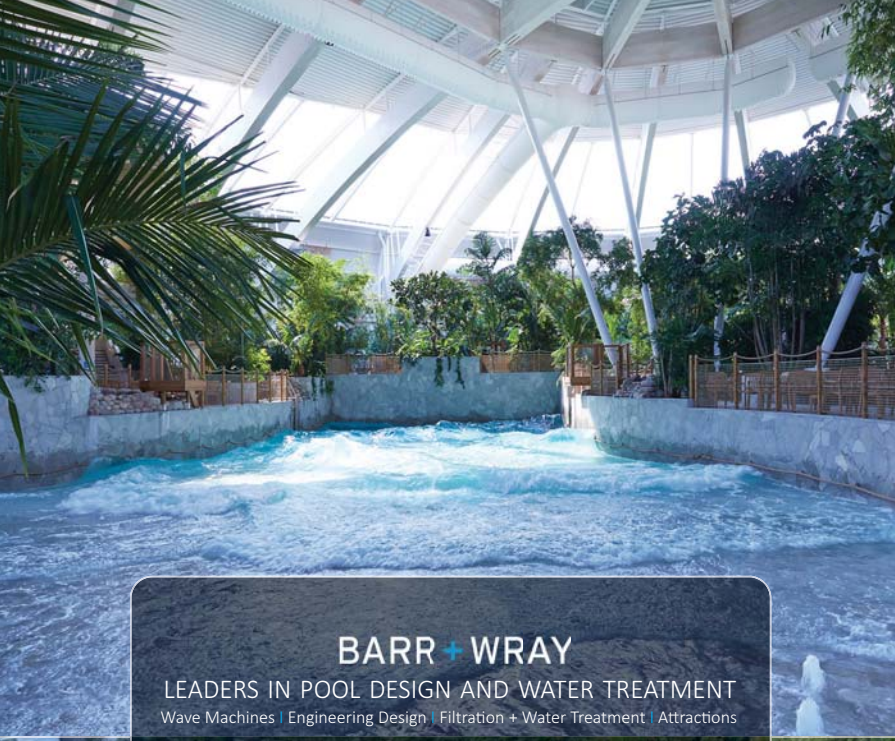

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